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The Long Death of the Chronicle

THE ONLOOKER

Time and Tide was on sale in Fleet Street on the afternoon of Thursday, August 18. A reporter bought one and casually exploded it in the news room of the News Chronicle about four o'clock, after which a steady rain of messenger-boys fell on the bookstalls to buy as many copies as they could find. The stall-holders were bemused : why the stir? Time and Tide, though revitalised under new management, was still a poor relation among the weeklies, its circulation was small, its influence limited, it was a beginner in the business of manipulating eyebrows or making politicians sweat. But it was learning and that day it printed a famous diagnosis and prognosis. What it contained, what absorbed all discussion on the editorial floors, was an article, entitled Do You Even Care, Mr. Cadbury?, which amounted to the most vigorous denunciation of the paper's leadership for at least a decade. By 5-30 it had circulated among heads of departments. In his office on the fifth-floor where he sat with the ghosts of his family who had been connected with the paper for sixty years, Mr. Laurence Cadbury was presumably informed though at this late stage he must have known the answer; his conscience had laid down its office. Had he consulted those ghosts before coming to his decision? Had they given him a dusty reception? Perhaps he didn't believe in them. Impossible, in retrospect, to say what he really believed in.

On the ground floor the bust of Charles Dickens, who lasted only three weeks as editor, was in more or less perpendicular line with the bust of the current editor, Norman Cursley, who had lasted three years and was holding the afternoon conference on the third floor. The Time and Tide piece was mentioned and promptly devalued because of its lowly origins. Everyone tittered, as at a bedraggled fortune-teller. The lights blazed out from the great ship at the foot of Bouverie Street and most of its occupants did not feel the decks beneath them lurch and tilt irretrievably to starboard. The News Chronicle and Star had just 60 days to live.

Mr. Cadbury felt it of course, up there on the bridge. He did not know, probably, the exact date : that, like so much else connected with him, was wrapped in the mists of uncertainty, those curious mists through which so many people who had anything to do with Laurence Cadbury had to grope their way, travelling not particularly hopefully because arrival was virtually out of the question. It was said of him that he actually enjoyed not making decisions : god-like, he watched destiny unwind before his eyes, watched the ebb and drift of 3,000 lives as time filtered out with an irresolution so profound that it might truly be called fatalism. Thus, even now he was not preparing anything as positive as scuttling his ship : he was merely allowing the sea to pour in. When the crash came on October 17 it was not surprising that he did not elect to address his staffs or appear among them in the thronged corridors to encourage, explain, console : it would have been stridently out of character, like Hamlet acting Henry V. While the shock-wave roared through the building he remained unseen, unheard-of, in his citadel of passivity, where in the last act of the long tragedy he fulfilled to perfection the role he had been cast to play : that of the presiding onlooker.

Do people shape history or obey it? In War and Peace there is a passag in which Prince Bolkonsky notes how little control generals seem to hav over a battle once it has started. Messengers come saying the right flan has weakened and troops are accordingly switched to the right. Th dragoons are ordered to counter-attack – but the dragoons have alread retreated. To each fresh challenge the general responds with a refle action: he does the obvious or he discovers that something has alread been done.

> *Prince Andrei listened carefully to Bagration's colloquies with th commanding officers and to the orders he gave them and re marked to his astonishment that in reality no orders were give but that Prince Bagration merely tried to make it appear a though everything that was being done of necessity, by acciden or at the will of individual commanders, was performed if no exactly by his orders at least in accordance with his design Prince Andrei noticed, however, that though what happened wa due to chance and independent of the general's will, the tac shown by Bagration was extremely valuable. Officers and sold iers . . . . . recovered their spirits in his presence and unmistakabl took pride in displaying their courage before him.*

That is one view. If one accepts it and Cadbury did no less tha Bagration, then he must be acquitted of the charge which has been levelle against him and his colleagues of mismanaging his newspapers' fortune across the threshold of disaster: for by this argument all men are to som extent helpless as the odds against them build up. Any News Chronicl man would admit: a circulation of under two million is a frail thing i terms of post-war economics, it means living in the presence of death Was recovery possible? When the battle was going badly, were all possibl steps taken? Were Mr. Cadbury's reflexes working right? Perhaps on cannot in all honesty say the officers and men took fresh heart from hi presence since they seldom found themselves in it, but one cannot hav everything. The point is: did he do what a general ought?

Laurence Cadbury's inheritance was an oddly split and slightly em barrassing one. It comprised an Establishment chocolate concern and rather dis-Establishment pair of newspapers. Cadbury the chocolate ma was one of the pillars of the land, you drank the virtues of straight dealing thrift and solid citizenship at bedtime or bought them packaged from slot-machine. Everyone knew that he was a model employer and that hi factories were unexcelled for hygiene, safety and good working condition In a word, immaculate. But from the first his newspapers must have bee a worry to him. In fairness it must be said that the Cadbury family ha poured money into them for years and seen no great returns, neither ha they looked for them. As a family, and Laurence was no exception, the were imbued to a high degree with the gift of disinterestedness and the did not care a fig about profit-snatching: they simply wanted to ru good-principled newspapers. The evidence is, however, that Laurence di not inherit from his father, George Cadbury, a like driving power or tha flair for a gamble which is the distilled essence of business acumen. Hi instinct was to play safe and from the beginning it must have warned hi that newspapers were unsafe and particularly newspapers with as dis hevelled a character and history as the News Chronicle and Star. Th statistics of survival have always been cruel to newspapers: the Time

reminded its readers on October 18 that the Chronicle itself had been an alligator in its time, swallowing in turn (having started as the Daily News in 1846) the Morning Leader, Westminster Gazette and Daily Chronicle. In a span of fifty years a radical paper's expectation of life was relatively as brief as a subaltern's on the Western Front.

In 1930 Laurence Cadbury was 41 years old. He had studied economics at Cambridge then gone into the business, helping to run already-flourishing concerns. Now the testing-time was apparently at hand: the News Chronicle, standing alone as the last bastion of radicalism, was poised to fight for its very life in the savage circulation war of the thirties and Fleet Street waited to see what would happen when the untried fledgling called for his sword and armour. In the event Cadbury came through unscathed because he was never called on to give combat. Instead the fire and genius of Layton were brought in and the critical test of Cadbury's measure as a newspaper leader postponed for twenty years. It is useless to speculate what might have happened if Cadbury, not Layton, had assumed active control: what is instructive is that Layton took over at Cadbury's direct request. Under Layton the Chronicle fought magnificently. It lost circulation heavily, in company with the Daily Mail, by joining in the free-gifts race which was triggered off by Lord Southwood's aim of giving the Daily Herald a two million circulation regardless of the cost. Southwood got his two million but couldn't hold it; the Chronicle slumped from about 1,600,000 to 1,324,000 then climbed back, with Barry as editor, by pursuing policies diametrically opposed to those of the Mail. Its fierce opposition to the dictators, its contempt for appeasement and Munich brought new renown as the months began the count-down to war. Layton made mistakes and made, finally, a success. But war-work and his consuming interest in the Council of Europe gradually erased his influence over the papers. In 1950 Cadbury took over as commander-in-chief and so came fully into his inheritance.

It was an abundance about which he must have had ambivalent feelings. For it presented anew that obnoxious combination of safety and risk, and both the Establishment and Cadbury were twenty years more established. Eschewing risk, he eased the Chronicle towards the Right and circulation began to fall off. The Chronicle until then had led a sheltered life. Newsprint rationing and pegged circulations had preserved pre-war readerships and the characters of newspapers in cold storage. The Chronicle's readers had placed upon it their champion's crown before the war: Cadbury's first act was to refuse it. Other problems loomed up: more newsprint was becoming available at an ever-soaring price and a national paper survey published in 1952 rode a coach-and-four through Chronicle's pretensions as a quality advertising medium: it said bluntly that it paid better to advertise in the Express or Times. Slowly the Chronicle's rivals, backed by the increasing advertising revenues which it could not attract, began to out-page it. Problems, problems, crying out for decisions, decisions, and the management of the Chronicle and Star were shooting like comets towards the end of all the time they had left. Decisions were what you could not get, there was a famine of them, and still the readers stole quietly away, 372,000 in those ten years and Suez can be discounted: it lost the paper 25,000 in five days including the last remnant of readership the Chronicle acquired in the patriotic north by buying the goodwill of the Manchester Daily Dispatch,

and the newsagents screamed they were getting an avalanche of cancellations. But when the smoke cleared the losses were not found to be crucial, though of course it didn't help the management to keep its nerve. No single issue killed the Chronicle : it died of a blurred image, and while it was dying the Times and Guardian picked up 271,000 readers. The dangers were foreseen, remedies suggested and Mr. Cadbury listened but did he catch what they were saying? Money was needed and early in the fifties commercial television presented itself, and if there was one thing commercial TV was begging for, after all those nasty, suspicious looks in the Commons, it was tone, and tone was the one thing the Chronicle had plenty of. It could have got in on the ground floor of Associated Rediffusion or ABC at the drop of a cocoa tin and one is overwhelmed at the vision of the profits which could have been ploughed back into the papers, enough, one imagines, to take care of that £400,000 loss the Chronicle and Star were heading for in the last year of publication, and with something to spare. Of course, it involved a risk, there must have seemed every excuse for not committing the slender resources of the Daily News Limited to such an imponderable gamble and indeed, Mr. Cadbury did not so commit them. Later on, once the essential soundness of these business enterprises had been established beyond reasonable doubt by balance sheets which bloomed profits of several millions, Lord Layton gently induced Mr. Cadbury to take an interest in the more modest operations of Tyne Tees Television; which might nevertheless have yielded £90,000 a year to the two papers had it been ploughed back, and assurances were at one time given that it would be, though they were not fulfilled. However, it could possibly be said that acquiring a television interest smacked of heroic surgery. Were there not plain, remedial measures to be taken, like, for example, improving the paper? Indeed there were and it may again be shown that Mr. Cadbury showed discretion and prudence in not taking them, for simply anything might have flowed as a consequence.

It is a fact that the News Chronicle knew more about its readership than any national newspaper. It carried out countless surveys during the fifties, employing expert pollsters and market research teams. We did not need to wait for the night when hundreds of is-it-true? calls jammed the switchboards and a sobbing woman at Penge told me the paper was her only friend except for her cat, to know this : we had the most loyal readership in Britain. From these surveys another deduction was made : the Chronicle could put its price up a half-penny and still keep a million of its readers. This was the statistical yardstick of their devotion. Michael Curtis, a young and forceful man, was editor from October 1954 to September 1957, and those who knew him best say he was in the process of becoming " a very good editor indeed." His cardinal defect, as it turned out, was lack of application to office politics. His plan was to raise the paper's price and tip it decisively into the quality camp, making it a sort of Liberal Daily Telegraph. With economies which included closing down the Manchester office and presses, and pruning overheads, he calculated he could keep the bulk of the Chronicle's readers, pay for the extra paging and recruit the highly-lucrative prestige advertising which it now sorely lacked. Had he simply gone and done it, there is a sporting chance the patriarchs of the fifth-floor might never have noticed : it is said that Cadbury spent an average of two days out of every seven in Bouverie

Street, he was a Bournville man at heart. As it was, Curtis blundered. He went to them and said: I want. It is an editor's job to run a paper and it is understandable the board of directors should resent an attempt to place upon them the final responsibility implied by assent. Excusably, they were frightened, and so they came up at last with a humdinger of a reflex action, the action of a frightened man with a pistol pointing at his head: they shot first. Curtis went and another solution which pressed too hard on the tender nerve-centre for a decision found its grave. In the same year another way out offered itself. The Daily Herald, like the Chronicle, had dropped below the 1.5 million mark, the point of no return. There was the prospect of a merger. Politically the difference between an "independent" Herald and the Chronicle under Curtis was a shaded one. A combined Herald-Chronicle would have started with a circulation well over two million and brave hopes of survival. Mr. Cadbury brushed it away with a spontaneous tribute to the absolute servitude in which machinery holds man: "But the page sizes are different. How can we publish different page sizes?"

In a recent letter to the Times supporting the sale of the two papers to Lord Rothermere, Lord Layton and Sir Geoffrey Crowther, the only non-Cadbury members of the Daily News Trust, let slip this revealing passage: "Whether it would have been possible earlier on to break this vicious circle is a matter of opinion and it is easy to be wise three years later." Three years later than what? They can be referring only to the negotiations with the Herald in 1957 and it can be inferred that they are by no means complacent over their outcome. The vicious circle was this: fewer pages than its competitors meant the Chronicle lost more readers which meant less advertising which meant fewer pages. And day by day the no-decisions were piling up for the funeral pyre: the obvious ways to break out had been put forward and vanished without trace, and probably now there was little hope. Informed opinion believes that after 1957 it would have needed an injection of up to £2 million to save the papers. Other last-ditch alternatives were suggested: a reduction in advertising rates (at £2,288 a full page the Chronicle was charging half as much for space as the Daily Express with between a third and a quarter of its circulation); change of editor. The advertisers were lukewarm about the Chronicle: had not the multi-million readership upon which mass-advertising depends, nor the wealthy readers who are the target of prestige advertising. Too many of its readers were like that crying woman in Penge: as a spending unit she wouldn't be worth the price of a single column inch once in a millennium. Presumably cutting the rates was discussed with Mr. Cadbury: the Herald simply went ahead and did it, by between twenty and thirty-three and a third per cent. Another shot in the arm, perhaps. The question of the editorship was more far-reaching. It is axiomatic that mediocrity attracts mediocrity as surely as damp draws damp and the appointment of Michael Curtis represented the board's last serious effort to rise above itself.

Frightened by the Suez furore, frightened by the eleventh-hour bid of a determined man to wring a decision from it, it sank wearily back and looked round for some capable successor who would get on with things and not look for trouble. Sporadic searches began: the names of William Clark, who edited the Observer's brilliant feature, The Week, and Gerard Gay of the Guardian, were rumoured. Neither, if in fact approached,

would have been a tame editor. After six months Norman Cursley, who had been with the paper thirty years, latterly as assistant then acting editor, while more dynamic men came and went, was made editor. When the Chronicle folded Cursley was 61 and Cadbury 71. Cursley made no striking innovations and indeed that was not what he was put there for: harsh things have been said of him but they ignore the fact that most men lose something of their grip after the mid-fifties and they overlook the fact that the man matched the mood of his masters; they could feel the night coming on, they were tired, they didn't want a firebrand to rouse them, they chose a consul at sunset. The best men on the staff began to pack their bags: nothing was done to persuade them to stay, not even James Cameron. The agonising indecision at the boardroom summit seeped down and divided professionally the editorial floors. Who were we fighting, the Telegraph or the Express? The night editor did not see eye to eye with all his subordinates and the atmosphere of the news room in the evenings was not lightened by the sharp difference in emphasis the night news editor and his deputy placed on a good 25 per cent of stories. All were excellent men, able to give first-rate service to the right master: trouble was, they were trying to serve an ostrich with two heads. The staff held meetings and sent protests to the management, three after 1957. The last one was the outcome of the Time and Tide article. Seventy journalists gathered and the first speaker said forthrightly the aim was to get rid of Cursley. Too forthrightly: he had support but it needed coaxing. The old hands counter-attacked. The sports editor warned against "insurrection." A watered-down resolution was passed asking the management to see the staff. Cadbury refused. Most of us hung on doggedly, hoping for a change of editor in February, when Cursley's contract expired. Wareham, the efficient ex-editor of the Mail, was approached. No time, really, for an answer.

Then came the peculiarly-worded notice ending the Chronicle's contract to print the News of the World in Manchester. Who had ended it and why? Some of us went to our typewriters with copies of Willings Press Guide and began clawing our way out of the hold. On the Sunday there was a convincing leak: someone had seen a copy of a Mail statement to retailers announcing the merger. It left a loophole just large enough to squeeze through a morsel of suspended disbelief. Not knowing whether the curtain would go up to discover us we took up our poses, the backchat took on a theatrical flavour: "I'll put in some expenses for them to remember me by." "You won't get anyone to sign them." "Send me to the Congo to make some." "We might not have the money to bring you back." The news-editor-in-chief, tall, dark and incredibly handsome, tried to inspire his eleven: "Come on, there'll be a paper tomorrow anyway. Let's have a bash." There was no response: we were up to theatricals but heroics were beyond us. By 5-20 next afternoon we knew the gist of it. As the copytakers put the covers on their machines and reporters crumpled up their half-written stories and the tape-machines died, we knew that though we had not got very close to Mr. Cadbury in the past and were not seeing him now, in spirit he was at last among us, in the clammy kinship of the final breath.

In the next few days the disclosures tumbled out: the offer from the Liberal syndicate, the fresh approach by Odhams, the strange business of the sale price, fluctuating from £1½ million to nearly £2 million, every

thing ending in nebulous half-truths. It was like bouncing cotton wool about. On the fourth floor, in the room which had once housed the political writers, an action committee was set up to fight for better compensation and to try to start up a new radical paper. Who would they try for the cool half-million the venture would need as an absolute minimum? Well, Charles Clore and Wolfson would certainly be on the mailing list: the new-rich aren't always Tories. On the floor below, as the days passed, the job-hunt dragged depressingly on. As the jobs came up, familiar faces disappeared, soon there was hardly a man left alive in the sombre green corridors, less and less often a typewriter stuttered into sudden life, sending out a last SOS. Two floors separated the few left from the man some regarded as the architect of their misfortunes, though that's too strong a word. In the character of Laurence Cadbury lies the whole heart of the decline and fall of the News Chronicle and Star but it is not true they met their deaths because he made anything as wilful as a blunder. Nor is it certain that they would have long survived in other hands. What is certain is that their deaths were hastened by his absence of leadership and in this one is saying no more than that in their time of crisis his newspapers were matched by that set of qualities most ill-suited to their continued struggle. And this is a clasic situation, for Cadbury was essentially far more of a contemplative than he was a soldier. He had the obvious clearly pointed out to him and of course it had an element of risk but not one a general would refuse. He did not even order up the troops; his conduct, though it did not involve abdication since he had nothing within himself to abdicate from, was tantamount to Bagration going to Napoleon and asking to be made umpire. Cadbury was no coward, but cowardice may well result from his failure by default. Who among the popular press will in future dare to speak out regardless of public opinion unless he can back his words with a multi-million circulation? And will this consideration not lead inevitably to growing monopoly? And how can anyone who wants to start a new paper prove to prospective backers that the News Chronicle was at least prematurely surrendered? The shadow of Laurence Cadbury will walk with all who try. The examination of the record leads to a conclusion which might have surprised Tolstoy: a man need not be content to be a plaything of the Fates; he can actually get out of their way.

IVAN ROWAN, 34, married, left the Evening Standard to join the News Chronicle as a reporter in October, 1958. It left him in October, 1960. Is to join the staff of the new Sunday Telegraph. Eccentrically educated at preparatory school, and by a tutor, with final carefree three year burst at Rudolph Steiner co-ed school in Cotswolds. Followed by army, journalism.

PABLO NERUDA
Translated by BEN BELITT

Four Poems

RITUAL OF MY LEGS

For a long while I've pondered them now – these big legs of mine :
with infinite tenderness, curious, with my usual passion –
as if they belonged to a stranger, some miraculous beauty
planted deep in the well of my thorax.
The truth of it is, as time passes and passes,
passes over the earth and the roof and my dissolute head, time
passing and passing, at length, in my bed, it seems something
more than a woman is breathing,
sleeping nude at my side.
Things odd and occult change place with an absent illusion;
thoughts morbid or mournful
that scatter the weight of the possible over my bedroom like pollen :
and it happens I stare at my legs as if they were joined to some bulk never
really my own,
trimly and powerfully thrust in my entrails, with a blow.

Like stalks, like some winsome and feminine thing,
they climb from my knees, compact and cylindrical,
tight with the turbulent stuff of my life :
brutish and lubberly, like the arms of a god,
like trees monstrously clad in the guise of the human,
like vast and malevolent lips, athirst and immobile,
all the heft of my body waits there :
the sum of the substantive, bald, with no burden of recondite meanings
no trachea, ganglia, viscera –
all that is purest and sweetest and gross in my singular being :
nothing but volume and form, in extension,
keeping watch on my life, none the less, with a perfect solicitude.

Others live in the tangible world
with no thought for their bodies, barely aware of its vigors :
fear walks the world of the words which pertain to our bodies – there is
fear –
as we chatter and sanction our clothing
and speak about trousers and suits with abandon,
or of lingerie (" ladies' " garters and hosiery)
as if business suits, utterly emptied, walked abroad in the streets, haber-
dashery,
and the rest of the world were a clothes-press, benighted and bestial.

Clothes have their existence : they have colors and patterns and forms,
and live deep – far too deep ! – in our myths;
there is too much shelter and furniture loose in the world,
while the flesh lives defamed, in a welter of scurrilous things,
underneath, obsessed with its thralldom, in chains.

Take these knees of mine : manifest,
functional, private, like knots,
dividing the halves of my legs, in their crisp confirmation :
two kingdoms distinct in themselves, two differing sexes,
are no less unlike than the halves of my legs.
Down from the knee to the foot – a tangible integer,
mineral, coolly available, appears
in a creaturely image of bones and persistence :
the ankles like pure resolution,
precise and essential, pursuing its will to the close.

And those legs, there, my masculine legs,
unsensual, bluff, and resilient; endowed
with their clustering muscles, complementary animals –
they, too, are a life, a substantial and delicate world,
alert and unfaltering, living watchful and strenuous there.

So, to the ticklish extremes of my footsoles,
stanch as the sun, and expanded like flowers,
a troop in the wan wars of space, unflagging, resplendent –
all comes to an end, all that is living concludes in my feet :
from there on, the hostile and alien begins :
all the names of the world, outposts and frontiers,
the noun and its adjective that my heart never summoned
compact with consistency, coolly, emerge.

Always
things, fabrications : stockings and shoes,
or simply the infinite air
dividing my feet from the dust of the world,
compelling my solitude, compounding my exile :
between life and the earth that I tread, the assumption, unyieldingly there,
the invincible power and the enemy-agent, laid bare.

HOW SPAIN WAS

Bone-dry and buoyant, day's drumskin
stretched with a sounding opacity : that's how Spain was;
an eyrie for eagles, flat-landed, a silence
under the thong of the weathers.

How, with my soul and my tears,
I have cherished your obstinate soil, your destitute bread
and your peoples; how, in the deepest
recess of my being, the flower of your villages,
furrowed, immobile in time, lives for me, lost,
with your flinty savannas
magnified under the moon and the eons,
gorged by a fatuous god.

All your animal
loneliness, joined to your judgment, all things built with your hands
in a compass of silence bounded abstractly by stones,
your vintages, the suave
and the coarse, your aroused
and your delicate vines.

Great sun-stone, unflawed in the zones
of the world, Spain threaded
by bloods and by metals, triumphant and blue,
proletariat of petals and bullets whom nothing repeats in the world :
sonorous, comatose, living.

THE BEGGARS

By the cathedrals, clotting
the walls, they deploy
with their bundles, their black looks, their limbs,
ripped tins of provender,
the livid increase of the gargoyles;
beyond, on the obdurate
unction of stone
they nurture a gutter-flower, the flower
of legitimized plague, in migrations.

The park has its paupers
like its trees of extortionate
foliage and root-forms :
at the garden's margin, the slave,
like a sink at the verge of humanity,
content with his tainted dissymmetry
supine by the broom of his dying.

Though charity bury them
in the pit of their pestilence,
they suffice for the human condition: they prefigure us.
Our wisdom is this: to trample them under,
to harry the breed in the sties of contempt,
servility's creatures, wearing servility's livery –
we may show them our bootsoles
or interpret their lack in the order of nature.
American panhandler, '48's,
Offsprings, grandsons
of churchdoors, I do not commend you.
I will not invest you with ivory usages,
the rhetorists' figure, monarchical beards,
or explain you away with a book, like the others.
I efface you, and hope –
who never will enter my discipline's love,
neither you nor your pieties, nor pass to my pity.
I exile your dust from the earth
and those who contrived you to soil
a contemptible image –
till metals remake you
and you issue and blaze like a blade.

HUNGER IN THE SOUTH

Woe in the charcoals of Lota, I see:
the dishonoured *chileno* in a black corrugation
rifling the bitter recesses,
dying or living, born to the pitiless cinder
in a posture of kneeling, felled
between bogs and black powder,
as if worlds might create and undo themselves
for only a winter's survival of coughing,
or the step of a horse through the pitch-colored water, where lately
the perishing knives of the stripped eucalyptus have fallen.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The myth of the omniscient expositor and the univocal poem have had no part in the shaping of these translations. Each word of the vexed and taxing originals, and their English equivalents, has been prayerfully meditated; yet commitment has exceeded meditation, in the end – as it must, if the result is to be a translation rather than a quandary. To keep up my courage under the assault of an identity which might otherwise have proved annihilating, I have mounted my language on rhythms which enlist the resources of poetry in English as much as they do the poetry of Pablo Neruda: I have worked at *objects*. The stresses, at times, have carried me further from the originals than I would have wished; and on certain occasions the locutions of English have tidied the syntactical disorders more than is proper.

Ben Belitt

Folie a Deux

It's a bit of a sod when you're writing about somebody and you find they're writing about you. If it's intimate, I mean. Because the other day I was just going through Ossy's bureau and I finds this :

May 6th : I really don't know what to make of it. An extraordinary thing ! And now, I have to ask myself why I have not told my wife. I cannot avoid the self-accusation of dishonesty, but she looks so ill and fragile. This paralysis is a great trial to her, she was such an active woman. Besides, I think her sense of duty aggravates her conviction that I find it difficult to manage things without her assistance. Alas, it is true that Claire's devotion to Parish affairs has always compensated for my own somewhat dilatory approach to the problems which fall to the lot of an ageing vicar.

Yet in all my years I have never gone through quite such a harrowing experience as that which found me so ill-equipped to deal with it this evening.

I had spent a pleasant half hour instructing the new server (a pleasant and intelligent boy) and was preparing to lock up, when it happened. Someone came into the church through the West Door (it should have been locked) and sat down in the sidesmen's pew. I had turned off most of the lights and was just opening the vestry door. I waited, in something of a quandary. People often do come into church like that to rest or pray, or merely to shelter ; but it was nine p.m. and rather late, I thought, for the exercise of that amiable tolerance which is the most strenuous discipline of my calling. Tired and hungry, I felt in no mood to provoke an exchange which might turn out to be boring, or even starkly unwelcome. Then, whoever it was (I could hardly see) began to sob in the most heartrending fashion. There was nothing for it but to investigate. An all too familiar situation, and one which I knew to my cost would put a humiliating strain on a charity already closer to despair than to God.

It was a woman, of course ! A massive, pathetic creature huddled in the shadows – and, I suspected, in an advanced stage of intoxication. Not a case for a few gentle, pious phrases. So much physical bulk and such obvious unhappiness made me timid, so I bowed my head and waited for her to notice me.

* * * *

Now that, if you can make any sense of it, is how I entered Ossy's life. Him with his head bowed and me in the act of damning me immortal soul.

Holy Mother of God it was like being drunk, just the same feeling so how should I expect *him* to know the difference? You know, when you've had one too many? Like falling down a hole. And there's this old priest I suppose *they* call it vicar, come down the aisle and stood over me like a judgement. The old buzzard. Still, he couldn't have known I'd swallowed all them aspirins *and* had a bun in the oven *and* crawled into the wrong bloody church to die in a state of mortal sin. Jesus wept. I looks up and

His utter absorption with words, his irresistible zest for living, his struggles for the pennies of existence. . .

DYLAN THOMAS

A SYMPOSIUM

Edited by

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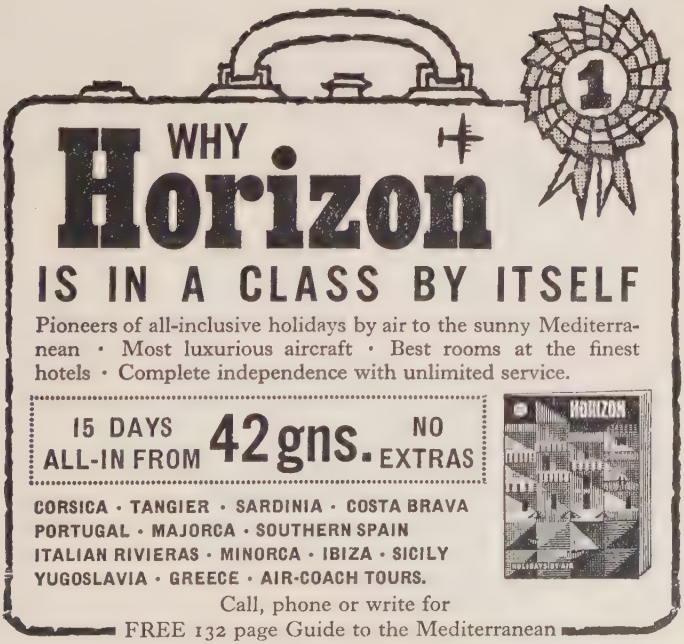
HEINEMANN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sees him standing there and thinks I shall die damned and lonely in a foreign country with this old streak to comfort me last hour. Had a wart on his chin with hairs sticking out. Couldn't make out if the place was dark or I was going already. I can laugh now but Christ I had the wind up then and not enough sense to tell the old fool to fetch a doctor.

Katie, when you get this letter light a candle for Peg.

Well, after a lot of shenanigans he gets me into the vestry and sees this lovely bulge under me coat and the look in me eye. Gets a medical pal from down the street. Katie that was an experience. I shan't forget it, no. They got it all up, the aspirins and me dinner and I prays they get *it* up as well, but no such luck.

You see his wife's got polio that's how I think it all started. You'll kill yourself when you hear he's going on seventy. He must have seen a thing or two that night anyway, he's been after me like a goat ever since and never mind the bulge, oh no. He's a very learned man I will say. All brain. But Claire, that's his wife, thinks it's immoral except for getting babies, by which I don't mean brain of course. She's barren or some such expression. Wish I was. But who's Peg to deny a man's natural appetites even if I am punished with this inside. I think it had a good old kick this afternoon, I wish it would kick itself to death it's going to make a difference to *my* life. Still, he's good to me I'm the organist here now and I live in and look after Claire as well. I don't think she knows what he's up to.

Don't ask me how it came about you know how it is when you're up against it and Ossy, I call him Ossy but his name's Ossian (Flint!) well he's a scream really. These Anglicans. I've seen some funny things in Dublin and I shouldn't be surprised that's where I got this inside, or Liverpool, but *he* beats the band. Comes up in his cassock after service, you wouldn't think she was upstairs all crippled and him looking like a sort of cross between a starved ram and a headmaster. It's hard to put into a letter but I get a few laughs what with him being so thin and peculiar and me well you know *my* size. Like cracking nuts. Isn't it funny though the things you'd never expect from people who ought to know better. Then I told him how I've got no parents and came over here and the hell they make your life. After all servants aren't what they were are they, to get kicked around. Not even in your opportunity state, I said. And then all that with knowing I was in the family way and getting depressed and taking the pills, because what is there to live for? I'm no Holy Mother. Ossy's sweet though in his way. I really do think it's doing him good. And to look at Claire you can see she'd die sooner than let him, even when she had the use. His trouble is he seems to worry. I can't make it out and I don't know why he doesn't just enjoy it while he's got it. But there you are he *is* a kind of priest he? Wait till you see May 17th.

May 17th: I see that I was interrupted during my last entry, to minister to the unfortunate girl I described – who was ill and had to be put to bed in the vicarage. Even now I can hardly bring myself to speak of these things, and were it not for my proneness to an ironic masochism I would discontinue this journal. However, I have never been guilty of blindness to my unorthodoxies as a clergyman, even if I have been cynical of my responsibilities. As an agnostic of some forty years' standing I have not once baulked at self-examination, though it promise to exacerbate the pain of a guilty conscience which can turn nowhere for absolution. Doubtless I would have been happier had I been of the Roman persuasion.

And now Peggy (who might be described, perhaps, as a dubious colleen . . . a Demeter of the Emerald Isle), Peggy is better, is so well indeed as to bring to my cloistered existence the delights of a somewhat prurient convalescence. We drink. We fornicate. I have become an ecclesiastical tosspot, and this a shameful document – the *" liber pornograficorum "* of a cleric so reduced and enfeebled by lust as to welcome the thought of his possible demise at the climax of the sexual act. In my youth, it was known among a certain clique of muttering youths as " dying on the nest " – and it has taken me fifty odd years to detect the note of poetry in this laconic phrase, so characteristic of the *Lumpenproletariat.*

But such a nest. The flesh tints of Reubens, the spacial solidity of Titian, the ribald speciousness of Rowlandson – all combined for the terrible sacrament of my disintegration.

N.B.—Investigate : (1) Randy.
(2) Get with it.
(3) Dig (of idea, curious phenomenon, etc.).

* * * *

Back again. What a day. We spent most of the afternoon you-know-how, so I made him take me out afterwards. Ossy bought a camera that takes indoor photos (he'll come to a sticky end this one), and some nylons for me. Said something about why don't we go off on his motorbike and spend a week rubbing brasses, which I suppose is his funny old way of saying rubbing Peg. Why should *I* mind? Rising twenty-two and my weight you can't pick and choose, but I'll say this for old men what they haven't got by way of you-know-what they make up for by cunning. Oh, he's full of ideas and talks all the time about something called prenatal conditioning. Well, we went to the pictures in Leicester Square a lovely film about a Thing. Came home on a bus. You've not lived till you've seen Ossy on a bus. What with the camera, his pipe and his umbrella and having to count out the fare. First thing I knew he was yelling fit to wake the dead and skeltering down the gangway in a cloud of smoke. Burning ash from his pipe. It had dropped down inside his umbrella and the last *I* saw of Ossy he was belting down Kensington High Street whirling a flaming gamp round his head. Well it was a quiet ride home, but laugh! Turns up panting like a dog at half-past seven with a black face, and what was left of his brolly draped over his arm like a smoked haddock. No sooner washed and has his dinner than off we go again. *This* time she was beating on the bedroom floor with her stick. Thought it was burglars. So, instead of going up to tell her some story to set her mind at rest he takes me into the vestry.

He has a sort of stuffed couch there and we gets down between the Mothers' Union banner on one side and the Church Lads Brigade banner on the other. No sooner had we got nice and comfy than Ossy leaps up with his trousers round his knees and scuttles into the cupboard where they keep the surplices, shouting choir practice choir practice! And sure enough there's voices outside and I've just time to nip in beside me man before they arrive. The next thing I know the little organ they have in the vestry's blowing away like a banshee with wind, and we're treated to a lovely rendering of born is the lamb or one of those.

I forgot to mention I had nothing on but me slip and the rest of me clothes was under the couch there.

Well. We stands there shivering and they stands there singing and it goes on and on and on. Ossy said never a word. I just felt his bony old hand wandering over me bulge in the darkness with the surplices and cassocks waving round us, and thinks did you ever! Then he would have his pipe. Of all the times and places. He must have his pipe and be damned. Meantime I've pulled on one of the cassocks and I'm feeling a bit warmer. But I'd had a premonition ever since the bus. And sure enough the burning plug comes out of his pipe like a perm on the flaming head of the Devil himself. You'll not have smelled burning cassock Katie so I'll tell you now it's a moving experience it's a revelation, as if they was setting fire to one of those old monks I should think that crossed the Holy Father.

I expect you've guessed the rest. Inside ten minutes we're standing there with the flames coming up round us, Ossy groaning and me wondering whether it's best to fry now or later. Then his shirt tail caught fire he'd forgotten to tuck it in, and *that* set him off. He flings open the cupboard door and he's through that vestry like a jumping cracker with me not far behind him, only tripping over the cassock.

I wish you could have seen their faces there'll be one or two in that bunch never sing another note for shock.

Now I'm in the bath, Ossy's locked in his study and the firemen are trying to put out the church but it's expected to be a total loss. Will post this when I've seen Ossy's entry for tonight.

May 23rd: As I write, the sky over South Kensington is red with the apocalyptic glow of my burning church. Peg is taking a bath. My wife is shrieking for information but I fear she will have to make do with Nembutal. The catastrophe is of such dimensions that no mortal grasp of the logical possibilities of life can do it justice. In such circumstances the mind is prone to clutch at detail. My collection of ikons (which I foolishly kept in the vestry) is lost. My Canterbury rubbings, which I transferred from the vestry to the house only this morning, are safe. The traumatic nature of the evening's events is mercifully obscured by a sense of their absurdity.

I console myself that my parishioners are at last aware of the salient inconsistencies of their spiritual shepherd! As I fled past the choirmaster in my halo of fire I distinctly heard him say: Now the old goat's been and gone and done it! Doubtless his reference was inspired more by the presence of Friar Peg in voluminous cassock than by the sight of my incandescent self. I defy any man alive to concoct an explanation of what happened that would satisfy the choirmaster. As for the bishop – that dour and underfed man of labyrinthine dissimulations – the bishop will certainly think it worth a gutted church to have such incontestable grounds for my liquidation. The Church of England has never known how to deal with its eccentrics, but has a nimble way with more purulent forms of dissent such as carnality and pyromania. The bishop does not dig me anyway.

Strange to sit here and watch those sturdy firemen going about their lawful business. Mournful to reflect that I had the joint ablaze within six weeks of the completion of the restorations. I can imagine the relief in high places that we failed to raise enough money to purchase a Graham Sutherland altarpiece; thus is philistinism ever at the service of thrift and thrift at the mercy of vulgarity. All the same I would have liked to see something nice and spiky in the place and I am sure we would have been able to get it down before the flames reached the chancel.

The roof of the nave has just crashed in.

Perhaps I should cram wife and doxy on to the motorbike and flee the country? Peg would like that, for her world has hitherto been restricted to Dublin, Liverpool and London. But I cannot see us arriving at a *modus vivendi* with Claire. I am inclined, in fact, to abandon my wife to the mercy of that God in whom she has still a certain weary faith. True, she is paralysed, and so entitled to such consideration as would be insulting to a person in a state of bodily health; and yet, apart from my respect for the integrity of medical science, I wonder if such paralysis is not an expression of the desire to yield volition and cower gratefully beneath the umbrella of necessity?

For dearest Peg, on the other hand, necessity is the mode of fulfilment. She is bewitchingly defined by her limitations. If their postulated God had been a Jesuit, Eve would have been a sort of Peg – would have renounced the apple and dreamed Original Sin out of a sense of destiny. Or some such nonsense.

Now the head fireman (or whatever he is called) strides forth from the holocaust bearing a chalice. I have never been partial to symbolism, but the moment has its dignity. Perhaps vicars should be burned with their churches, as captains used to go down with their ships. Why, the good fellow is waving the chalice at the crowd! Where does he think he is? Wembley? I presume he *is* the head firman, since he appears to have a larger crest on his helmet than the others. Now the chalice has been snatched from him by one of the sidesmen – a venerable banker, who is doubtless grateful to be able to rescue our silver and the vessel of Christ's Blood by a single stroke of the arm.

The doorbell has not stopped ringing since we found sanctuary here after quitting the turbulent scene at the church. I must wash and divest myself of these poor charred garments, and go down. Tonight I must also inform Claire of the true nature of our little *ménage à trois*. In a way, it is exhilarating to think that at sixty-eight one can be so indisputably committed to the Way of Choice rather than the Refuge of Determinism.

* * * *

Oh Kate what a time we've had! It's October now and I've got a little boy who doesn't look like any of his possible Dads, and we've just come back from Europe where we went on Ossy's bike the morning after the Fire. That morning! It turned out the old girl (Mrs. Ossy) wasn't paralysed after all, would you believe it? She's up at half-past six and takes all me things and throws them downstairs you see Ossy had told her about Us the night before. Well, and the last to go is me little trunk that's been with me everywhere, and as she tips it over the banisters she can't get her hand out of one of the handles and over she goes *with* it. A shackled and self-destructive soul, she's dead as a doornail when we picks her up and as He says these things are never accidental. There's those with the Will to Live and those without. So, let the dead bury the dead says Ossy and rings up Claire's sister and asks her to see to things. We put the poor old thing on the couch in Ossy's study, covers her with a blanket, locks the door and posts the key to his sister-in-law. There was no time to waste that day. Fancy all those years in bed when she could have been up and about, just for spite.

We packed two suitcases and bunged them in the sidecar, then I got on the pillion and Ossy was just kicking the starter thing when he suddenly moans and claps his hands to his face. Now then says I, this is no time for

second thoughts. But he moans and moans, and finally croaks at me, Rigor Mortis! It went to my heart the way he looked sitting there with wisps of grey hair floating round his ears and one foot on that pedal. So then it's back into the house and break down the study door, switch on the electric fire and get somebody to come and Lay her Out.

Well we finally got to Europe which is a lovely place with many fine churches and paintings. But I got homesick and Ossy gave me a book to read which he said would remind me of Dublin. This book is very thick by a man called Joyce and its title is Ulysses which I recommend you never to read if you are feeling likewise. If that is Dublin then I am a Dutchman which as Ossy says is a logical impossibility since I am Irish, though not proud of it. According to him I have a Natural Intelligence which he says he will nourish, and I will say the book has a moral which seems to be that if you do not know who your Father is you must not allow the fact to grind you down. Thus we come to my confinement and talking of Fathers I wish the one responsible had been there, for it nearly ripped me in two when it came and now my bubbies look like mangled rubber balls, what with the way it eats. But lovely to be down to eleven stone again.

After Europe we came back to London and now go by the name of Travers. We have two furnished rooms in Highgate and Ossy is writing articles, at the moment one on a frog philosopher called Sart I think, and one on a Cardinal called Newman. Also he is helping me to perfect my Literary Style as I have taken to showing him my letters to you and he says they are very Human documents. I cannot help wondering what would have become of me if I had not found Ossy that night in his church – and, indeed, what would have become of the old lecher himself. He is much the same though in some ways and will still have me morning noon and night as the fancy takes him. But I am full of love and take his brittle old carcass and rolls it between me flanks, though I stand in the full glare from the Devil's eye and dare not think of the prognosis for me immortal soul. At the same time Ossy is not an ordinary man and sometimes gives me a turn as you will see from the following.

October 30th: Today I says to myself it shall be Sartre! And Sartre it was though I lost my favourite pen and pounded the rest of the day on a typewriting machine. Now, would it not be true to say that by a process of what you might call psychological exfoliation, Modern Man is reduced to the status of an Object? I have tried this out on Peg, who retorted that Modern Man is a figment of his own imagination! This delightful hunk of girl is revealing what the novelists of my youth used to call "unexpected depths of character." If it were not for her nauseating infant, what succulent morsels might we not disinter from the seething chaos of a mind steeped in the trivia of twentieth century existence? For Prom (we have named him Prometheus in honour of our freedom, stolen like fire from the teeth of metaphysical opposition), for Prom I say, obscures the finer points of our relationship at the moment. Conceived in what slum, born in the Camargue, destined for the stultifying complications of mother love, this outrageous little parasite is a wily enemy. Rattle in hand, nipple clenched firmly between the gums, he insinuates his revolting person between us at every turn. Ah, Prometheus Travers, the struggle will be long and there shall be no quarter!

Holy Mother of God I says to Peg, can we not give him away? Sell

him? Barter him? Have him pressed and use him as a sentimental bookmark? She gives me one look, and I cowers back over my article like any other demoralised hack. What a mercy it is that babies are so small and puny, for had they the physical stature of men they would quickly establish themselves as our masters and the world would be ruled by the rattle, civilisation held in bondage to the Pleasure Principle.

A dynasty of Tots!

Yet when I see our politicians, men of power, promoters and neo-tycoons disporting themselves on the television screen, I am inclined to think that from their statements and various antics one can construe the beginnings of such an Infantile Revolution. Imagine beneath those well-cut suits – the Nappy! Behind those horn-rimmed glasses – the azure vacuity of the *Tabula Rasa*! Inside those damp mouths – the sour and milky regurgitation of a primitive organism! The final take-over bid of them all will surely set a rotund infant on the throne, to bubble the time-honoured platitudes at us and wiggle a biffy fist from the balcony of the palace.

Peg will not have it so, but what loving mother does not secretly wish to see her plump and dribbling youngster attain worldly honour whilst retaining precisely those characteristics he had when shot parboiled and yodelling from the womb?

But who is Ossy to deny a woman her natural aptitudes even if I am punished with this little Prom on the rug? He gave me a good old kick this afternoon, I wish he would kick himself to death he is going to make a difference to *my* life. Still, Peg is good to me and you know how it is when you are up against it. These Celts. This morning she decides to bake us a cake. Well, anyone who hasn't seen Peg in a kitchen hasn't lived! What with not understanding about gas cookers and trying to finish Finnegan's Wake and maundering over her cub – the last *I* saw of her before lunch she's hurtling downstairs with a flaming cake held aloft and screaming like a banshee. Most amusing. Turns up at half-past twelve, tearfully clutching a few black and pathetic crumbs.

I wonder if Peg and I are pyro-prone, so to speak?

* * * *

Oh Katie, I don't know what to make of it. An extraordinary thing! Ossy looks so ill and fragile that I fear I have not the courage to pass on to him my observations regarding his Behaviour during the last few weeks. The fact is that on three occasions I have seen him deliberately place Prom (my baby) on a high stool in front of the fire and leave him unattended. It is a miracle that there has not been a Tragic Accident. Then yesterday, I had just finished some washing and I hears somebody sobbing in the most heartrending fashion in the living room. Ossy has lapses you know, and when he does, he often goes into the living room to rest or to pray. Even though an agnostic of some forty years' standing I believe he still has a little weakness for the Ritual. Well, I rushes in – and there he was. Ossy, of course. Huddled on the carpet in front of the fireplace with Prom in his arms and what I can only describe as a sacrificial look on his (Ossy's) face. Not a case for a few gentle, pious phrases! But he lets me coax the child away from him. Even now I can hardly bring myself to describe it. That ancient man . . . that spindly cleric . . . is so reduced and enfeebled by jealousy as to be tortured I'm sure with plans for Infanticide. And my

poor Prom the object of this madness! He is troubled with something wrong inside for sure is Ossy, and has the look just lately of a man destined for an overdose. Whether it be pills, insanity or murder I cannot say. Here is Jan. 13th.

January 13th: I looks up and sees her standing there. I looks down and sees the little babe in my arms, and the fire roaring in the chimney like a furnace. His nasty face is turned up to me and well, if I ever saw naked hostility in the face of a child. So I gives him over to Peg. I noticed today for the first time she has a wart on her chin, with hairs sticking out.

How to wean doxy from *doxelino*? Permanently?

* * * *

Katie, I cannot write of the things that have happened this last week. I shall enclose a bit I cut from the newspaper about it all and leave my grief to your prayers. More when I have got over this terrible tragedy.

> Interviewed outside the burnt-out ruin of her Highgate flat, 22 year old Miss Peg Donovan denied the truth of reports that her child had wilfully set fire to the Reverend Travers. Her child, she said, was only a few months old and could not possibly have struck a match. She added that the Reverend was often careless with his pipe, and might well have set fire to the house himself.
>
> Miss Donovan, a tragic figure in borrowed jeans and wellingtons, said that her baby Prometheus and the Reverend Travers will be buried side by side in the graveyard of St. Matthews, South Kensington. Recalling the curious coincidence that St. Matthews itself was destroyed by fire in May of last year, Miss Donovan went on:
>
> "I can think of no finer resting place for my baby than beside the friend who had so devotedly loved him during the pitifully brief time of his stay on this earth."

DAVID MERCER was born in Wakefield in 1928. He left school at the age of 14 and for six years (three of them in the Royal Navy) worked as a pathological laboratory technician. From 1949-1953 he studied painting, and then spent two years 'sulking' in Paris. He now lives in London and teaches science at Barrett Street Technical College. The B.B.C. commissioned him to write a radio play which has recently been completed, and a stage play of his may be put on in the provinces in the New Year. He is at present working on another stage play.

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It is a multiple million eyed monster
it is hidden in all its elephants and selves
it hummeth in the electric typewriter
it is electricity connected to itself, if it hath wires
it is a vast Spiderweb
and I am on the last millionth infinite tentacle of the spiderweb, a worrier
lost, separated, a worm, a thought, a self
one of the millions of skeletons of China
one of the particular mistakes
I allen Ginsberg a separate consciousness
I who want to be God
I who want to hear the infinite minutest vibration of eternal harmony
I who wait trembling my destruction by that aethereal music in the fire
I who hate God and give him a name
I who make mistakes on the eternal typewriter
I who am Doomed

But at the far end of the universe the million eyed Spyder that hath no name
spinneth of itself endlessly
the monster that is no monster approaches with apples, perfume, railroads, television, skulls
a universe that eats and drinks itself
blood from my skull
Tibetan creature with hairy breast and Zodiac on my stomach
this sacrificial victim unable to have a good time

My face in the mirror, thin hair, blood congested in streaks down beneath my eyes, cocksucker, a decay, a talking lust
a snaeap, a snarl, a tic of consciousness in infiinity
a creep in the eyes of all Universes
trying to escape my Being, unable to pass on to the Eye
I vomit, I am in a trance, my body is seized in convulsion, my stomach crawls, water from my mouth, I am here in Inferno
dry bones of myriad lifeless mummies naked on the web, the Ghosts, I am a Ghost
I cry out where I am in the music, to the room, to whomever near, you, Are you God?
No, do you want me to be God?
Is there no Answer?
Must there always be an Answer? you reply,
and were it up to me to say Yes or No—
Thank God I am not God! Thank God I am not God!
But that I long for a Yes of Harmony to penetrate
to every corner of the universe, under every condition whatsoever
a Yes there Is . . . a Yes I Am . . . a Yes You Are . . . a We

A We
and that must be an It, and a They, and a Thing with No Answer
It creepeth, it waiteth, it is still, it is begun, it is the Horns of Battle it is
Multiple Sclerosis
it is not my hope
it is not my death at Eternity
it is not my Word, not poetry
beware my word

It is a Ghost Trap, woven by priest in Sikkim or Tibet
A crossframe on which a thousand threads of differing color
are strung, a spiritual tennis racket
in which when I look I see the aethereial lightwaves radiate
bright energy passing round on the threads as for billions of years
the thread-bands magically changing hues one transformed to another
as if the
Ghost Trap
were an image of the Universe in miniature
conscious sentient part of the interrelated machine
making waves outward in Time to the Beholder
displaying its own image in miniature once for all
repeated minutely down with endless variations throughout all of itself
it being all the same in every part

This image or energy which reproduces itself at the depths of space from
the very Beginning
in what might be an O or an Aum
and trailing variations made of the same Word circles round itself in the
same pattern as its original Appearance
creates a larger Image of itself throughout the depth of Time
circling outward thru bands of Nebulæ & vast Astrologies
contained, to be true to itself, in a Mandala painted on an Elephant's hide,
or in a photograph of a painting on the side of an imaginary Elephant
which smiles, tho how the Elephant looks is an irrelevant joke—
it might be a Sign held by a Flaming Demon, or Ogre of Transience,
or in a photograph of my own belly in the void
or in my eye
or in the eye of the monk who made the Sign
or in its own Eye that stares on Itself at last and dies

and tho an eye can die
and tho my eye can die
the billion-eyed monster, the Nameless, the Answerless, the Hidden-from-
me, the endless Being
one creature that gives birth to itself
thrills in its minutest particular, sees out of all eyes differently at once
One and not One moves on its own ways
I cannot follow

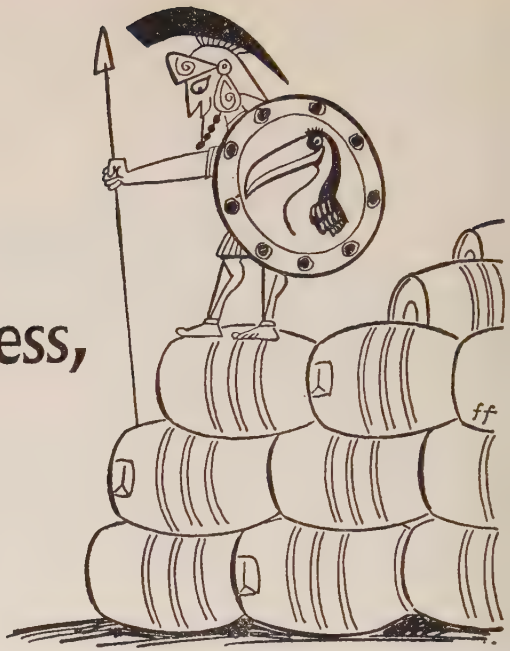
And I have made an image of the monster here
and I will make another
it feels like Cryptozooids
it creeps and undulates beneath the sea
it is coming to take over the city

it invades beneath every Consciousness
it is delicate as the Universe
it makes me vomit
because I am afraid I will miss its appearance
it appears anyway
it appears anyway in the mirror
it washes out of the mirror like the sea
it is myriad undulations
it washes out of the mirror and drowns the beholder
it drowns the world when it drowns the world
it drowns in itself
it floats outward like a corpse filled with music
the noise of war in its head
a babe laugh in its belly
a scream of agony in the dark sea
a smile on the lips of a blind statue
it was there
it was not mine
I wanted to use it for myself
to be heroic
but it is not for sale to this consciousness
it goes its own way forever
it will complete all creatures
it will be the radio of the future
it will hear itself in time
it wants a rest
it is tired of seeing and hearing itself
it wants another form another victim
it wants me
it gives me good reason
it gives me reason to exist
it gives me endless answers
a consciousness to be separate and a consciousness to see
I am beckoned to be One or the other, to say I am both and be neither
it can take care of itself without me
it is Both Answerless (it answers not to that name)
it hummeth on the electric typewriter
it types a fragmentary word which is
a fragmentary word,

MANDALA

Gods dance on their own bodies
New flowers open forgetting Death
Celestial eyes beyond the heartbreak of illusion
I see the gay Creator
Bands rise up in anthem to the worlds
Flags and banners waving in transcendence
One image in the end remains myriad-eyed in Eternity
This is the Work! This is the Knowledge! This is the End of man!

My Goodness, What a Marathon!



ACCORDING to Herodotus, a Persian army of 100,000 was disposed of by the Greeks at Marathon. This has since been regarded as a much exaggerated figure.

There is however, no denying that 5,000,000 GUINNESS are enjoyed every day. And when one considers what a vast phalanx of Guinness this is, one is tempted to misquote Byron, and say:—

"*When I look down on such mountains of Guinness,*
Guinness looks downright good to me."

5,000,000
GUINNESS
ARE ENJOYED EVERY DAY

G.E.3256.L

The Politics of Reviewing

In July 1960 Mr. Anthony Hartley writing his "Letter to an Aldermaston Marcher" in ENCOUNTER declared: "The question I would like to ask the founders of the anti-nuclear campaign is: Do they regard as one of their objectives a break with NATO and the American alliance?" Several correspondents, notably Mr. Wayland Young, pointed out in the subsequent issue that not only is the answer an unequivocal *yes,* but that such has been the widely-publicised policy of the campaign since it began.

Now Mr. Hartley is well-known to readers of that caucus of journalism which occupies literally and politically the liberal centre, and it may be that this glaring error provides a kind of starting point for an investigation into the body of criteria (if such exists) which informs its critical habits. For I would suggest that the mistake embodies rather more than deficient homework; it implies the permissible limits of his thinking. For him it is sufficient to direct the premises of the anti-nuclear group through logistic processes to a personal circumference, beyond which lies incoherence and chaos. In doing so he is unaware that his path of extrapolation is already well worn.

To some extent this liberal-humanist blinkering is common to the world of the week-end critic, and it is perhaps important to examine how far this kind of criticism is adequate in penetrating its object, and how far some of its assumptions can be held to illuminate a liberal-humanist critical ethic. Here of course the questioner is up against his greatest obstacle. For by its nature liberalism extols freedom and variety, and he who attempts to present it as unitary, is open to a charge of paranoia. It will be apparent later that the chief deterrent which the liberal could hold against this inquiry is in fact a slick manipulation of psychiatric jargon; that the enquirer is discovering conspiracy and inconsistency where there exist merely agreement and diversity. It can be argued that the sheer variety of views expressed about the criticised object is sufficient to do justice to it, and that the capacity of the individual reviewer in the role of highly intelligent opinionator to sustain a steady public provides a proper safeguard against unbalance. The danger here is that responsibility for fair reviewing is removed from the individual and his editor, and fair treatment for the object becomes accidental. Moreover, while the operation of a free enterprise marketing system for reviews may entail rejection of the very worst, its operation is too slow to guarantee responsibility before the case against the reviewer is proved.

But like dogmatic Stalinism and neo-Freudianism, the lib-hum position *qua* criticism can conceal behind its surface coherence a slipperiness in the face of criticism which needs to be described and evaluated. To illustrate this point I want to take for example the treatment given to a particular book. "Out of Apathy" is the first of a series of New Left books, and it seemed to me that the views of the New Left Group, standing in sharp contra-distinction from any conceivable liberal position, might be expected to whet the blades of its critics and hence reveal that position more clearly.

An account of the book should emerge from all this, but it is perhaps necessary to say as a preliminary that its structure is that of a symposium on contemporary Britain by six writers. It is concerned to set off alarms all over the apparently cosy and innocuous surface of our society. It explores and challenges the mainsprings behind the facade and explores their intricacy of interpretation most exhaustively. The immense constrictions upon the intellectual of the left and the wooden apathy of the aff-soc-man are seen as part of the same pattern. One of the authors, Mr. E. P. Thompson, plays the role of editor, contributing an introductory essay and a finale entitled "Revolution" which attempts to point to a constructive future, given acceptance of the analyses, and the will to reject the status-quo. He also contributes a critique of Orwell and Auden.

THE TIMES, THE ECONOMIST, THE DAILY TELEGRAPH and THE SUNDAY TIMES did not review the book at all. Reviews in JOHN O' LONDON'S WEEKLY, THE SCOTSMAN and THE SOUTH WALES ECHO were too tiny to be able to give chapter and verse support to the nibbling criticisms they make. THE DAILY WORKER suffers from space limitation, as does REYNOLDS NEWS and in neither case does criticism reach beyond the curate's egg level.

Two reviews from the left are worth considering however in that certain criteria are discernible in the texture of the criticism they make. Mr. Jay Blumler writing in SOCIALIST COMMENTARY is clearly for the Gaitskell-Crosland group of "reformers" in the Labour Party. His method of criticism is simply to argue the point with the authors of the book and to demonstrate that his view is better. He accepts and indeed applauds the idealism and the analysis but rejects the strategy of attack. He does not accept for instance the thesis (Stuart Hall) that the contradiction between production for profit and production for use prevents us from righting the balance between private affluence and public squalor, that "reformism" is impotent and that the pre-requisite for a socialist and humane society is a dominant public sector. He counters this by saying that the premise is unverifiable, suggesting (though no Marxist he) that subsequent events tend to bypass such generalisations. He can as easily envisage the growth of a society imbued with socialist values which will demand concessions to the public sector, as one which insists primarily upon public ownership. And so the argument goes. At each selected quotation or summary, a juxtaposition with his own view, which by being implicit and recognisable, calls into the discussion much of the debate

No time for trivialities?

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which has always gone on in the Labour movement. No brilliant turns of phrase, exquisite paradoxes or high noise-level in the writing at all. But the reader learns fairly adequately what the book is about. Fairness is strained only by the reviewer's commitment which is acknowledged.

David Caute in THE NEW STATESMAN is warmer towards the book. Half of his review summarises the salient features of it as analysis, but like Mr. Blumler he is less happy with the authors' prescription for the way out :

> Eager to denounce Stalinism and to dissociate themselves from Bolshevism, these writers make little mention of the immense institutional, educational and moral achievements of the USSR which, despite the lack of political freedom, should be an encouragement to all who believe in the efficacy of socialist planning. Why is this? Just as the British Labour Party finds itself wedged between communism on the one hand and capitalism on the other, so these contributors are also hemmed in, both physically and mentally, between the CP and Mr. Gaitskell's people. The result is an uneasy confusion.

This criticism is followed up by a pursuit of the editor's "solution" into a request for the answers to "how" questions. " What," Mr. Caute seems to ask, " is the blueprint for the revolution?" What are to be the mechanics of the transformation? He suggests that the positive way out of apathy offered is of much smaller stature than the comprehensive analysis whose precursor it is. Mr. Caute, one feels, genuinely wants to know the answers. Unlike Mr. Blumler he offers no confident personal position as a weapon to engage the book dialectically. But again without verbal fireworks he illuminates the arguments it makes, and we know what the book is about, as well as where it seems to fail *in relation to what has actually been written*. It is conceivable that his objections could be met in further debate with the authors, but his success as a critic is that one feels that the debate is continued. Furthermore, in the light of what will appear later in this article, we must be thankful that these two reviews were *about the book*.

Over towards the right the situation is not so happy. True A. J. Ayer in THE SPECTATOR gives an extremely fair précis of the book. In fact two-thirds of the review is just this. Again the analytical chapters are admired and again appears the request for a positive direction after the escape from apathy. The inadequacy of such a constructive plan is made

itic's Diary, Vicky's draw-gs, reports from special corres-ndents in Washington, Mos-w, Paris, Bonn, New Delhi, c., V. S. Pritchett's Books in eneral, the famous 'This gland' column and the liter-y competitions – these are a w of the things you will enjoy the NEW STATESMAN. . .

Read by nearly half-a-million people every week, the NEW STATESMAN is a best-seller. Ask your newsagent to keep you a copy every Friday

plain in fact by all the reviewers which mention it. It is true also that in none of the reviews is such a plan presented or even hinted at, and while it may not be the function of a reviewer to do the authors' work for them, those who like Professor Ayer and Mr. Caute accept the diagnosis of society offered, cannot escape at least a glancing reflection of their own criticism. It is not sufficient to plead weakly as does Ayer, that the picture has been exaggerated :

> Scientific research can be valued for its own sake even though it is financed by private industry. Commercial television may be more popular than the BBC but a substantial proportion of the public chooses to watch or listen to the more serious programmes. The official record with respect to town-planning may not be very good but it would be unfair to overlook on the other side the work of the Arts Council and the National Trust. Penguin Publications is a commercial enterprise, but it has made possible for works of literature to reach a public which hardly had access to them before the war. A society in which the *Iliad* can be a best-seller, and scores of thousands of people are ready to buy serious works of philosophy, cannot be justly said to have delivered itself entirely to commercial values.

This is a puny antithesis to the widely-documented contrast drawn in the book between the extravagance of private industry and state niggardliness in the public services. Evidence of smatter interest in orthodox cultural forms is a rather last-ditch of small-arms fire against the acknowledged howitzers of Messrs Hall and Samuel. It is as if Professor Ayer is much to honest not to accept the latter, but suffers a failure of nerve in contemplating the outcome of it, and if it is true that he finds the authors' prescription unsatisfactory, his search for grounds for complacency evidences a parallel, if less courageous predicament.

For different reasons the same failure of nerve shows up more raggedly in TIME AND TIDE. Again we have main presentation and in addition a bold-type framed apologia to prepare the magazine's readers for the heresy :

> Bernard Donoughue, the author of this review, is 25 and was a contemporary at Oxford of several of the New Left group. He is now a Research Student at Nuffield College. We publish this review in the belief that, though Time and Tide does not agree with the aims of the New Left, they are a serious group and deserve to be taken seriously.

This is followed by a potted history of the growth of the New Left from its dual origins of Oxford and the New Reasoner group of marxists in the north. To be fair, it must have been very difficult for Mr. Donoughue to weld together his quite serious attempt at criticism with a lengthy apology for reviewing the book at all. Unfortunately the reviewing part suffers

heavily in consequence. Ralph Samuel and Stuart Hall get praise for their analysis, but Dr. Alasdair MacIntyre is curtly summarised as being " turgid on the social sciences " and Mr. Peter Worsley's article on imperialism is disposed of with the words " conventional and uninteresting." The three pejorative adjectives: turgid, conventional and uninteresting, carry no weight at all without contextual qualification. Conventional with respect to what convention? Uninteresting to Mr. Donoughue because perhaps he prefers a game of tiddly-winks to reading articles on imperialism? Mr. Thompson's essay " Outside The Whale " is " almost unreadable," but occupies the remainder of the reviewing space:

> From a ragbag of jargon, miscellaneous quotations and overblown images he establishes the (reasonable) premise that disenchantment with communism and the fixed stance of the cold war are responsible for much of the inflexibility in our thinking. He then reaches the unreasonable conclusion that Britain must immediately disarm, leave NATO and break with the United States. He does not envisage the possibility that by dismembering NATO and indulging (like jingo tories) in childish anti-Americanism might have much worse consequences than mental rigidity. On the contrary, Mr. Thompson foresees remarkable results at home as well as abroad. He says that " should the protest in Britain gain sufficient strength to force our country out of NATO " then perhaps – by an incredible chain of events which he suggests – " the socialist revolution would be carried through." Optimism is expected in a book denouncing apathy; but it is no good having illusions about the possible effects of unlikely (and at the moment undesirable) eventualities.

Leaving aside such questions as how in an almost unreadable text, a ragbag can give rise to a reasonable premise, and the absence in my toothcomb of any incitement to " childish anti-Americanism," we are back with Mr. Hartley once more. For there is no hint here as to whether the unlikely and undesirable eventualities belong to Mr. Thompson's world or Mr. Donoughue's. They may be horrifying to Mr. Donoughue, but are they to Mr. Thompson? He is really getting his wavelengths mixed up with Mr. Thompson's and in the absence of any attempt to get *inside* the latter's argument, we can only regard the review as a description of Mr. Donoughue.

Still, the constrictions involved in trying to do serious political reviewing for TIME AND TIDE might make even Mr. Thompson blench, and it might be kinder to view Mr. Donoughue's effort more as a brave set-piece of missionary education in the Tory backwoods than as a serious essay in political reviewing.

No such special pleading can be appropriate when we come to discuss what Mr. David Marquand makes of the book in THE GUARDIAN:

> Ever since Mr. Anthony Crosland published " The Future of Socialism " the Right has had the theoretical initiative inside the Labour Party. The Left has bellowed with pain at every assault from the leadership but its bellows have only been an emotional reflex, not an intellectual counter-attack. The authors of " Out of Apathy " have tried to give theoretical content to these bellows from the Left. Their own voice is a raucous one, better adapted to shouting slogans than to persuasive argument, but they do at

least speak in the accents of the 1960's – and they may well find some eager listeners. The positive message of "Out of Apathy" is terrifyingly simple. Britain is still wandering in the wilderness, as far as ever from the promised land – and the manna we think we see about us is, in fact, only a mirage.

Thus in Guardianesque "bright young man" style we are again on familiar territory. Back to the restricted lib-hum continuum where antitheses of the "reformist-fundamentalist" kind are meaningful. Mr. Marquand's own position is made obvious, but he has yet to reach the high noon of chi-chi necessary to unleash his rhetorical broadsides. After a brief summary of the analytical essays of Stuart Hall and Ralph Samuel we reach :

> For the authors of "Out of Apathy" have drunk deep of that intoxicating brew the conspiracy theory of history. According to that theory nothing happens by chance. On the surface power may be divided among its competing groups and decisions taken as a result of a temporary balance between them, but this is only a facade. Beneath the surface of the social sea lurks the Octopus, in whose tentacles we are all ensnared. Everything the Octopus does is done by design, but usually design is sinister. If a business man subsidises the Royal Court Theatre, it is not because he likes drama, it is because he plans to hoodwink the theatregoers.

On page 145 of "Out of Apathy" E. P. Thompson writes :

> It (the "Natopolitan ideology") is an intellectual and cultural fact in its own right – a certain *stance* in relation to circumstances, a capitulation of the centres of agency. While the prevalence of this ideology of apathy endangers the world, it was not thought up by some master of deceit in a conscious plot to destroy the world. Rather, it grew up by its own logic within a social context conducive to its growth.

You may well ask, to paraphrase an old rhyme, who is reviewing what, with what, and for whom. In fact the Thompson essay is about just this kind of slick and univalent psychological view of political motive, and since the essay is later described in the review as a "long illuminating essay on Orwell and Auden" we must assume that Mr. Marquand had read it. Who would suppose from :

> It would be easy to dismiss the authors of such a programme as political neurotics unworthy of serious consideration. Easy : but foolish. For neurosis must be understood before it can be cured, and however neurotic they may be, the neurosis is certainly widespread.

that a great deal of Mr. Thompson's article argues against the replacement of an examination of objective situations by the imputation of unwholesome motives? That Orwell is seen to be wielding a one-edged sword, that a "neurosis theory of politics" can do damage also to the quietists and the conformists.

From a critical point of view it is less important that author and reviewer are right or wrong, than that Mr. Marquand blandly ignores the implicit criticism of his own method contained in the work he is reviewing.

But the diagnosis of this syndrome is not yet complete :

> But why insist that the pressures are deliberate? Why insist on the conspiracy theory at all? Partly of course, because of its obvious

psychological attractions. The educational revolution after all, has not satisfied all those whom it has benefited. There is not room at the top for everyone . . . During the last ten years the traditional party system has failed to provide a channel for the moral enthusiasm and even the personal aspirations of young people. Politics have become a game played by the professionals according to rules which only the professionals understand. The excluded amateur naturally feels that the professionals are all in the same nefarious plot. At bottom, the New Left, like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, is part of a widespread revolt by the political amateur.

The New Left might well stand aghast at this reduction of its work to the status of mere sour grapes. However from a purely critical point of view, it must be clear that "the long illuminating essay" has shed its light on Mr. Marquand's opaque surface, since it poses questions already answered by Mr. Thompson. It is also clear that he can ignore facts, in order to bring the discussion within the orbit of his own preconceptions, where, like Mr. Hartley he can set his own rules for the liberal game of dialectical shove-ha'penny.

After reading a review of a political book there ought to be something for the reader to say or act upon, if only the decision to read or not to read, to buy or not to buy, and even perhaps something to argue or think about. Even the ghostly struts of Mr. Marquand's psychological metaphysic provide a framework upon which a few ideas can hang, even if they are retrogade in relation to the book. Unless one is familiar with Mr. Julius Gould's world-view it would be extremely difficult to relate his review (THE OBSERVER) to anything more substantial than his obvious malice for the editor of "Out of Apathy." For him:

> Part of the trouble is the ambivalence throughout the book between propaganda and analysis. Which is it to be?"

But there is surely no need to make such a choice in any book of political evangelism. That they are held to be complementary need not be reprehensible or vitiating:

> If its propaganda for "young people who are acting already against the imbecilities of our time" well and good. One does not expect of propaganda that it be true or coherent, only that it be effective. If it be taken as social analysis the high-pitched certainty of its tone is at least premature.

Who is the "One" who expects this of propaganda? Is the propaganda true, effective or coherent? We are not told, for this is the last word in the review about this ambivalence. On the analysis we have:

> The analysis rests, of course, (*why "of course"*) more upon heat than thought. The main theoretical chapter, by Dr. Alasdair MacIntyre, is a mish-mash critique of the social sciences. Dr. MacIntyre votes for Hegel and Trotsky rather than Keynes and Talcott Parsons. But before he reaches this exciting conclusion he drags himself through Freud and Wittgenstein, Popper and Oakeshott, Lukacs and Bentham. It is all very wearying for any but the most dedicated of readers.

Put this way the chapter is wearying indeed, but Mr. Gould's syntax illustrates relationships which are not made. The groupings: H plus T rather than K plus P; F and W, P. and O, L and B, imply a structure in

the thesis which is not there. Dr. MacIntyre's finale indeed finds him preferring Trotsky to Keynes but in the relevant chapter Talcott Parsons is drawn against C. Wright Mills; Popper, Parsons, Mills, and Oakeshott, against Marx and Hegel. Freud and Wittgenstein are discussed in relation to their contemporary bowdlerisers. Mr. Gould is therefore not discussing Dr. MacIntyre's views so much as illustrating his own weariness.

Messrs. Hall and Samuel get praise for their analysis, with a parenthetical rider that " Professors Galbraith and Titmuss have said a lot of it before – with more dignity and authority." Such a comment might seem meaningful if one could not too easily imagine the reverse situation, off a review on Titmuss and Galbraith which said " Messrs. Hall and Samuel have said the same, and more, with a more uninhibited vigour."

The remaining two hundred odd words of the review are devoted to Mr. Thompson's contributions, and Mr. Gould's observations on the author's integrity, the sole point of which seems to be that Thompson stinks. His coda illustrates this point :

> Former Communists are entitled to be heard – but they should not assume so infallible an air. After all they *have* been wrong – at least once before. I shrink from a more severe critique only lest Mr. Thompson, as is his custom, attribute it to the machinations of NATO, the Pentagon, or, still worse, the Ford Foundation itself.

* * * *

Obviously the idea of the liberal critic occupying the politically sane centre has only a rhetorical significance. For he is not really at the centre of anything beyond his own sphere of values, whether that sphere be the formless nebulus of Mr. Marquand, or the little pellet of personal malice within which Mr. Gould lives. His technique it seems must be to circle around the target in orbits compulsively various, in order to fire off critical bolts from missile bases not susceptible to retaliation. To stand still would involve an accusation of *commitment*, a word which seems to have become left-wing property. It is true that an insistence on " committed " criticism can interfere with freedom, and I am sure that no liberal needs chapter-and-verse qualification for this statement from me. What seems to have happened here, however, is an obsessional retreat from it towards a nebulous notion of freedom, where anything goes. Journalism, dealing as it does with perishables, must aim for an attractive presentation, and since by these standards sober argument is less likely to be a good sell, style and rhetoric have come to dominate criticism rather than to embellish it. There may be other and more psychological reasons for this retreat, the analysis of which might form a suitable bit of homework for Mr. Marquand – after he has read " Out of Apathy." A more hopeful suggestion could be that these week-end critics get down to some serious study of what is required to achieve a breakthrough from their own too-familiar territory; to fill up the awful gulf obtaining between the technicolor of for instance Mr. Alistair Cooke at one pole, and the drabber reportage of Reuters at the other. This achieved, they could then work out a critical method less demanding of stylistic invention, while at the same time paying more attention to what Dr. Leavis calls " the words."

RICHARD COOK was born in South Shields in 1929. After National Service he went to King's College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne to study dentistry and he now practises as a dental surgeon in London.

Two Poems

RESPECTABILITIES

Many liberals don't just
Make love, they first ask each other;
And either is free to decline
What the other wishes;
That is, unmitigated
Possession of the beloved's flesh.
Nothing hasty, nothing unconsidered
Catches the liberal by
The hairs of lust. Nothing.
And this consideration
For those feelings
Of the approached one naked
In love or in hunger
Is extended to all.
He will, for instance, ask
A starving man if he
Would eat, pressing
For the particulars
Of hunger. And enquire
Why he is deficient
In bread. All men are treated
With such perception as stones
Get in subjection to
Their shaper, as their use fits
To his. Men are chosen to meet
That judged compassion which
A liberal has. A wounded man
Receives the ointments of love
From matrons, with respect.
Sex, the inhuman hunger,
Demands courteous
Submission, polite domination.
In fact, the turning world,
A stone delicately
Veined with acceptable
Colours, deficient just because
Another stone has gouged
A bit from its flesh
Demands the liberal heart;
Though another stone
Brutal in the untamed

Components – a misshapen
Tongue of useless rock –
Merits, and gets
A frank dismissal.
And this, too, is fair;
Though more than half the earth
Is denied purchase on
That delicate conscience
Cash gives : a fair if privileged
Mind veined with gold.

THE POSSIBILITY

I accept all
Of what seems large,
The ship in the sea's unlovely
Pressures. We cut

By as much
As we are pressed. Water
Begins its unsmiling hurts.
Behind, the bay

Shifts small if
Clear, a past become
What it is : detached, seen, despoiling
Its richnesses.

If ever it
Had them : houses
With love in bed weaning to fullness
Its moment.

But sun
Puts forth the light
We move on, a track from past
We leave

Through sea's
Incessant hiss of
Collision on the boat
As it pushes

Sharp, taut way
On tormenting waters.
If we turned back, what past is
Preserved through

Itself would be
Made bare of fact as
A scoured shelf's first deprived
Of jars

Then
The skin of dusts
That vaguely obscures the first white
Cleanness.

What we fear
Is such past which
Not destroyed yet now falls short
Of what we were –

As we move on
Light, a track that leads
From the town shrinking like a heart
In moral danger.

Where we lay
And took, as bird
Rising in flames takes
Victory in pain.

Only less.
Small but hard the moment
Of indestructible heart.
Which is burning;

Caught, stilled, held
Through its own pain.
No other terms. Nothing more
Or smaller

Allays, increases
Whether or not it
Be burden, or kind of crutches.
If the boat

Cuts the sea
It is waters also
Persuade it to cut, clenching us
The further

We rise over
The poised lifts high
Of salt rent through which
The misery

Pours in,
A weight
With mass without sense
On, on

What hope had.
The heart with love.
We have no heart. There is
Again the moving

Out from, the pause
On the tip of piled
Waters, the fall, then.
In departing.

We must be
On, having now
Less than there was : the land
That we ever

Constantly held
In belief, a claim
In substance, less now; and we move
From it. Yet

There is this :
When the limits of pain,
Ecstasy, glimmer up, showing a frontier,
A kind of

Pure hope; pure
Because it cannot
Be chosen, nor be anything
Other than

Now what
Despair makes it, neither
Made nor imagined otherwise.
The kiss on

Your closed eyes,
If this is despair
As we move from what we knew
Over water

We did not
Think as tented, pulled
In such upward wrath of earth,
Then it also

Is hope; as
Under my kiss you
Ask if this is possible
And I say

Yes, this is possible.

JON SILKIN : born London, 1930. He held the *Gregory Fellowship* Poetry at Leeds, 1958-1960. He has written *The Peaceable Kingdom* a *The Two Freedoms* and has recently completed a third collection of poe – *The Re-Ordering of The Stones.*

Work from a novel in progress

The heath lay black and dead under a purple shadow which came from the city lights. The trees wore a soft, red veil of shadow. The grass was damp, and Titon stooped to collect the dew in his hands. He wanted to taste it as though this contact would help him to feel some intimacy with the earth. He leaned his head forward, stretching his tongue towards his hands, but suddenly withdrew it. He had been repelled by the thought of other bodies which might have sojourned here. Now he felt the dew stinging his hands, for he was sure that it must have been diluted with another's urine. How many pints of piss had rained down where he stood? Bladders from all parts of the world must have made an ocean over this acre of grass. And the earth had drunk it up. Baked dry by the sun, the ground was sweating another kind of moisture in the night.

He wanted to wash his hands. Perhaps the dew was clean, but he couldn't resist the snobbery which ordered his hands to be clean. There was nothing like feeling the disgust of another person's offal cling to your own body. And suddenly he ran towards the pond. There was no sound but the hurried slap of his hands shaking the water against his clothes. Then he walked until the grass felt level, and his body found a rest between the trees which he couldn't see.

It seemed that the events of the day had returned to question his presence here, and he recalled how he had spent the evening, and thought that it was good to pause, let patience immobolise all ambition until you had learnt your own desires from the start. "But I have waited too long," he said, "I have almost forgotten why I was waiting." Suddenly he stopped, listened, and waited as he heard someone emerge from the pond. Now they were near, and equally deprived of recognising faces in the dark.

* * * *

He could hear her searching the pockets of the mackintosh; and he felt like reaching towards her not from desire for contact, but rather because he wanted to feel the movement of her hands. The voice was light, ephemeral, and a little nervous. So he judged that her hands were supple and strong; thick wrists and fingers like a working man's, reliable and tough. But he didn't touch her. She had turned away. He saw a yellow flame briefly impaled on the night, then a whiff of smoke dissolved into the night. She kept her head away from him, concealing her identity, and dragged long and leisurely at the cigarette.

"It's hardly the right night for bathing," Titon said.

She didn't answer as though she felt it was his duty to make the right kind of conversation. There was a movement of feet over the grass behind them; and Titon waited until the noise passed. A torch flashed briefly towards the pond; there was a pause in the traffic over the heath, and then the stride continued, louder and more determined. But it was now further away, moving further away. He wondered what Jeremy would have done in this kind of encounter. It was the sort of meeting which Jeremy would have turned into drama, perhaps a tragedy, according to the needs of this girl whose voice was the only clue to her existence.

" Were you waiting here long?" she asked.

" I don't remember," said Titon, " I wanted to wash my hands, then I thought I should stay since the place was deserted, and I didn't want company . . . . "

" Why didn't you leave when you heard me coming up?" she asked.

" I didn't think it would matter since you couldn't see me."

" Perhaps you expected to find I was a woman."

" I never thought about it," said Titon, " I heard a movement in the water, the person was coming towards me, and I was curious to know what would happen next."

" And suppose I had turned out to be a man," she asked, " would you have stayed?"

" I think so," said Titon, " but I wouldn't have spoken to you."

" Why?"

" I suspect male strangers out here at this hour."

" Why?"

" They might be police or men whom the police are looking for."

" Are you afraid of the police?"

" Not afraid," said Titon, " but I prefer to avoid them if the circumstances could arouse suspicion."

" You could always explain."

" I have a feeling that the law never pays attention," he said, " moreover I don't like talking to officials about private matters."

" He would only have asked your name and address . . . . "

" And what I was doing," Titon added, " and that would have offended me."

She lay still, the cigarette making a red hole in the night. The noise was passing again behind them; and she waited to hear where it would end. It came nearer; the torch flashed again in the opposite direction, and the noise followed the light, until the boots had lost all sound.

" Do you like sharing things?" she asked.

Titon was astonished by the directness of her voice; it had become familiar, even confidential and a little hopeful. He wondered what she was expecting to hear; or what she had hoped to say.

" Or don't you?" she asked.

" What sort of things?"

" Anything," she said, " provided it's really yours."

" I share whatever I can afford," he said.

" And what's that?"

" Friendship, company, sometimes my money when I have enough."

" And that's all?" she asked.

" I don't list these things," he said, " but they happen and sometimes I remember."

" What have you shared recently that you would want to remember?"

Titon tried to think of something : an episode , a gift, a love affair; but he wasn't sure which kind of thing she might have in mind.

" A year ago I met a girl," said Titon, " an American. She had come to dinner with some friends of mine. I don't remember paying her much attention until she was about to leave . . . out of the blue I told her I'd like to give her a souvenir of this evening. She said yes, and the next day I sent her a painting, the best I shall ever do since it's the last I shall ever do."

She must have noticed the change in Titon's voice which had grown softer, less formal, almost emotional.

"Are you a painter?" she asked.

"The nice thing about the American girl," Titon said quickly, "was the way she accepted. It was as though she expected something like that to happen. She wasn't in the least surprised."

She noticed that he had avoided any mention of being a painter.

"Are you a very private person?"

"Very," said Titon, firmly.

She waited to hear what he would add; but Titon didn't speak. For a moment he had been distracted by the recollection of the American girl.

"You shouldn't answer if you don't want to," she said, "but why did you give her the paiting?"

"I liked her," said Titon.

"Was that all?"

Titon hesitated. He felt the need to be accurate on this point. The girl was waiting, and her silence made the pause almost urgent.

"In a way I think I was rewarding her for something I don't often see," he said.

"Was she pretty?"

"Yes," said Titon, "but it wasn't that. Everybody had a good time; but she enjoyed it. Affection really meant something to her, and you could tell by her presence that she had found it."

He was thinking of the evening as he spoke; and the novelty of the girl beside him had gradually lost its impact on him.

"Did the others feel that way about the American girl?"

"They said they liked her," said Titon, "and that was true; but I don't think they felt what I saw when she was about to leave."

"Why didn't you notice it before?"

"I don't know," said Titon, "I think that kind of recognition comes sudden, although it might have been building up all the time, in the smallest ways and by remarks or gesture which you didn't even register at the time."

"Have you seen her since?"

"A couple of times," said Titon, "but she soon went back."

"Did she ever write?"

"Post cards only," said Titon, "and I'm sure it's always when she remembers the evening . . ."

"Does she mention it?"

"Never, nor the people she met."

"Suppose you came to realise that she didn't really deserve the painting, would it matter very much to you?"

"Not really."

"You wouldn't feel hurt that your judgment had failed you?"

"Not at all," said Titon, "I don't like to be wrong, but I'm never ashamed of making mistakes, particularly about people."

"You wouldn't mind if people came to think of you as a bad judge of character?"

"I don't ever want to be a judge of character," said Titon, "good or bad, it makes no difference."

"But there are people you like and people you don't like."

"Of course."

"And you must have reasons."

"I'm sure there are always reasons," said Titon, "but I don't separate what I like from why I like it. My reason is only a part of my feeling . . . "

"You really believe that?" she asked.

"Believe what?" Titon asked, a little puzzled.

"That it is your feeling which comes first with everything."

"Not only first," said Titon, "it comes at the very beginning and at the end and it runs right through the middle."

"And your reason."

"They aren't separate." Titon said, "at least I don't feel that way. If I like you, then all the reasons for liking you are already contained in the emotion which tells me that I like you. The same is true if I come to dislike you."

"And don't you ever try to analyse this feeling?"

"It's a waste of time," said Titon.

"But why?"

"It analyses itself," said Titon.

"And you are not interested in finding out more about it?"

"Of course I want to find out more about my emotions," said Titon, "but I don't have to set to work trying to do so."

"How can you find out?"

"Through the evidence of my behaviour," said Titon, "everyday I do something, I say something, and what I do or say belongs entirely to me."

"You don't feel much guilt?"

"I often regret things I do but I don't nurse my regrets."

"Have you ever murdered anybody?"

"What?"

Titon was astonished by the sound of his own voice. For a moment the girl thought he might have been a criminal, the way he responded to her question; for it wasn't killing which she meant.

"I wasn't thinking of killing anyone with your hands or a weapon," she said. "I meant murder in a sort of psychological sense, like doing something to someone from which they've never recovered . . . which sort of leaves them incapable of functioning ever again.'

Titon was thinking: was I ever in love? How did I really feel when I deserted the army in the San Cristobal plains?

"You see what I mean?" the girl said, as though she were pressing him for an answer.

"Yes, I do," he said, slowly, cautiously, feeling his way towards an answer that would be true. "How can you ever tell whether you've done so or not?"

"By the evidence of the other person's life," she said. "You have the person you found alive and whole and you have the person whom you've crippled."

Titon was thinking again: was I ever in love?

"You see what I mean," she said again; and it seemed that she had come closer.

"Yes I do," said Titon, "but I still can't see how you can tell. Sometimes a person may want to die on your hands so that you become a perfect excuse for their refusal to be alive."

"Is that true?"

" I've had friends with that kind of trouble," he said, " and some of them have stayed married all through it."

She was wondering how far she should go with her questions. The movement of feet was passing again. It came towards them, and the torch flashed up at the trees, but they paid no attention. She was thinking out her questions, and wondering in a second's pause : I wonder who he is : a painter, and he sounds foreign in spite of the perfect enunciation of words. She had walked out of the pond into the stranger whom she couldn't even see in the dark; and suddenly she wondered what he looked like : complexion, the colour of his hair. Was he short, medium height, how tall, and what sort of walk did he have? A momentary fear made her ask herself whether he might have had a limp, one arm, or was he blind in one eye. The possibilities were innumerable. Suddenly she turned round. She was looking directly where his head should be. Titon was curious about the silence and the occasional noise of feet in the distance. It was the moment he started to retrace what had happened since he left Jeremy and the man outside the pub. He had got as far as the splash of water from the pond and the crush of leaves under the feet walking blindly towards him.

" Tell me something," she said, " but not if you think you shouldn't." Her voice came abrupt and final into the silence.

" I shan't if I don't want to," said Titon.

" Good, I'll understand," she said and paused; then added a trifle nervously : " Have you ever been in love?"

Titon had a sudden shudder : like being spied on or caught in the act of spying. He didn't answer, and he made it seem that the noise of leaves nearby was his reason for delaying his answer. The torch flashed again above their heads. Someone knew they were there, and was watching for some movement. The girl sat up.

" I'll make you an offer," she said.

" What's that?"

" Let's separate now, and you can answer my question tomorrow."

" And where do you go from here?"

" I don't want to say," she said.

" I see," said Titon, and wondered about their next meeting.

" What time tomorrow?" he asked.

" About this time. Right here."

" What time is it now?"

" I don't know," she said, " but I'll be here half an hour after closing time. I'll wait until the clock strikes twelve. If you're not here by five past, I'll assume you changed your mind."

" Shouldn't I drop you where you live?"

" No."

" But why?"

" For one thing, I prefer to be alone now," she said, " and also I prefer, for the time being, not to see what you look like."

" Have you any ideas?"

" None at all."

" Make a guess."

" I don't want to," she said, " let's leave it at that."

"Very well," said Titon. He wanted to take her hand; but he could not see; and it would have been silly to search for it and miss.

"Bye bye."

"Until tomorrow night," she said, and walked off towards the ridge of houses that rose like trees where the heath ran into the street.

GEORGE LAMMING is 33. He is a West Indian novelist born in Barbados. He came to England in 1950. His first two years were spent in reviewing and in writing for the B.B.C. (Overseas). He has written *In the Castle of My Skin, The Emigrants, Of Age and Innocence, The Pleasures of Exile,* and *Season of Adventure.* He was awarded the *Guggenheim Fellowship* to the U.S., 1955; and the *Somerset Maugham Award* in 1957.

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Emanuel Litvinoff

The Lost Europeans (Heinemann, 1960, 18/-.)

During the war Mr. Litvinoff, the poet, took upon himself the traditional Jewish rôle of prophet. Unlike most of the war poets he aimed, by setting the war in the context of symbolic destruction and creation, to 'know more than the immediate wrath'. In *The Untried Soldier* (Routledge, 1942), with the assurance of one who speaks because he *knows*, he pronounced:

> It is not disintegration; a universe is coming to birth
> And so am I.

Out of the fragments of experience shattered by the war new patterns seemed to be forming, images of fertility, the naked girls and the rich womb. The second volume of poems *A Crown for Cain* (London, The Falcon Press, 1948) continued the prophecy of, and the search for, 'an image of a man with ripeness past anguish'. The ghostly fragments of old broken symbols were reforming into:

> . . . the rounded limbs of a girl, a curved shape
> moving in aqueous gloom like a white fish,
> and then a stallion coupling with a mare,
> as passionate and indifferent as flame,
> rearing out of darkness as a new symbol among ruins.

Throughout his poetry the war was treated, in the language and philosophy of Exodus, as 'a symbol of transition' taking its place among the traditional symbols of the new dawn and fertility, the Jewish note of futurity, the myth of the Israelites, the Promised Land. Whenever he presented immediate reality to his reader it was more often than not explicity qualified by the epithet, 'symbolic'. Even he was the 'symbolic soldier'. At that time his work was of necessity prophetic and symbolic and it courted the dangers of turgidity and failure to connect the concreteness of present reality with the permanent symbol. It was inevitable that after the war, since all his work pointed to the future, the prophet must confront reality in order to test the prediction of his symbols, to test the poetry against prose. Compulsively the symbols pointed to Berlin. The themes of the poetry are brought to earth exactly as the reader of Mr. Litvinoff's poems would expect. We must acknowledge gratefully the fruits of necessity and compulsion, the choice of an inevitable form rather than an arbitrary bid for circulation.

In *The Lost Europeans* we have a continuation of these symbolic themes; and partly a clear and compassionate account of a real situation in the light of these themes, and partly a forcing of reality to conform with the predetermined symbols. Martin Stone, a Jew of the younger generation, returns to Berlin to claim restitution for his family's fortune (both materially and *symbolically*, we are told on the wrapper). The novel shows the intricacy of his passage from bitter hate, through the indifferent demands of the blood, into life-affirming love for Karin, the girl from the Eastern sector, who in turn must reawaken to love after her stultifying

experience at the hands of Russian soldiers as a young girl at the fall of Berlin. The theme is an extension of the poetry:

> He had come here raging because nothing could be done to cancel out the killing of even one human being. Now he knew that guilt and punishment were meaningless, life-suffocating abstractions . . . Life went on despite man's self-destruction. Because the loins were stubborn and passionate, because the moist vagina drew the impetuous seed into the blind, instinctive womb. And in the waters of that darkness a gentler civilisation might yet germinate.

Against this we have Martin turning suddenly cold when Karin says, 'I feel tonight that you may have given me a child.' Against this affirmation is set the ambiguous parting of Martin and Karin at the end of the novel, against the eternal renewal of promise the harsh reality of the new menace, 'the change of uniform'. Mr. Litvinoff's poems 'groped uneasily' towards morning'. Towards the symbolic morning Martin Stone 'gropes uneasily' in Berlin where the early morning scene is one where 'the first newspaper vendors, their voices still heavy with sleep, were already shouting the new day's alarms': mornings too in each of which, for Hugo Krantz, 'the day steadily disintegrated'.

It is not only through Karin that Martin Stone passes to his revelation. He reacts against his fellow Jews, especially those of the older generation, who remain petrified in hate and ideas of retribution, in 'life-suffocating abstractions.' There is Goldberg ostentatiously assertive, whose death Martin hastens by striking him for insulting Karin. There is Hugo Krantz, 'Berlin's Oscar Wilde' compulsively searching for the lover who betrayed him to the Gestapo, Putzi von Schlesinger. Without their hate these would have no basis for a continued existence. Martin reacts against Germans like Heinz Dieter, Krantz's valet and secretary, an image of Putzi before the betrayal, who scatters his seed indiscriminately about Berlin. He reacts against the city itself, which is vainly trying to recapture the gaiety of its 1920 period. Mr. Litvinoff probes the glittering surface to show how through these reactions against German and Jew, whose faces, like the face of Lot's wife, are turned towards a past irrevocably destroyed, Martin Stone affirms, in the widest sense, his Jewishness and his humanity. The symbolic pilgrimage interacts effectively with a real human situation, in whose complexities Mr. Litvinoff moves with much understanding and a certain grace.

In addition there are what appears at first to be further complexities but which eventually appear to be an ill-considered attempt to simplify for the symbol's sake. In so far as the theme of rebirth is carried by the sexual experience of the characters, one can see the point of making the contrasting figure of Hugo Krantz a homosexual whose fertility is stifled and whose warmth is betrayed. But this is the dividing line between the success of a symbol as an informant of reality and its breakdown into over emphasis, weakening the humanity of the figures. In addition Krantz also suffers from heart-trouble, caused, as the doctor tells him, by 'over indulgence, the malady of prosperity'. And when the doctor also says that 'the heart is not an organ you can afford to overtax', one feels that the author has added one stroke too many. Krantz suffers most from being moulded into a symbol he does not fit. His search for Putzi von Schlesinger who has become a chief in the *Volkspolizei* in East Berlin, ends by his

being shown into a seemingly empty room :

> ' Putzi?' he said tentatively, taking a step forward. The figure stepped forward too. Then he realised that he'd addressed his own reflection in a full length mirror attached to a wardrobe.

Mr. Litvinoff clumsily symbolises the tragedy of Krantz, which, had he entrusted it to the more delicate quality of his writing, would have been far more compelling. He will not trust his adequate depictions of reality to do their own work. In the same way he attempts to bridge the gap, which he himself must feel to be widening, by an occasionally glib Freudian comment intended to gloss either the symbol or the attitudes of the characters as persons. Not only does he adjust reality by these means, but he is also anxious lest the reader may not perceive the adjustments. Stone meets an old friend, a Jewish actor of his own age :

> ' I've discovered the advantage of being bilingual. I can play sinister foreigners with broken accents in English and German.' Martin grinned wryly. ' There's something rather symbolic there, I suppose.'

The ' grinned wryly ' does not conceal the voice of the anxious author. The voice intrudes in many places. Martin sees Krantz reflected in a dark window, and sees in this ' an image sketched upon unreality ', and ' it created a symbol of loneliness that all his drunken rhetoric had only imperfectly conveyed '. A one-armed boy begs from Krantz and retreats ' dwarf-like and symbolic.' Finally, when, in Frau Goetz's boarding house, Goldberg occupies the bathroom too long, and Frau Goetz places the wireless at full volume outside the door to drive him out, one has, rather ' wryly ', to agree with Martin Stone's reflection that ' it would have to be Wagner '.

The details of Berlin, where they fit easily into the omniverous theme, and may comment on or reinforce it, are deftly handled, but on apparently extraneous detail Mr. Litvinoff is less attentive. Does he really imagine that his incidental picture of English journalists in a Berlin bar is a matter of fact? Are they really ' probably homesick . . . for the dull thwack of the leather ball against wood, and the spatter of hand-clapping as batsmen strolled peacefully to and from the pavilion'? Is this the reason why they put away whiskies ' quickly and with determination '.

It is where the theme of Mr. Litvinoff's poems is fully tested against reality that the characters, especially Martin and Karin, exist as very sympathetic human beings and as contributory symbols to the pattern which the author cannot do without. But by forcing minor characters into a symbolic structure, he crams his space, and forces out some of the reality of his major characters. In *The Untried Soldier* Mr. Litvinoff told us :

> There is a stream in me contains
> Such symbols . . .

The stream is dangerously near flood-level; an inundation would depopulate his writing. He is, like some of his figures, in danger of petrification by becoming immersed in his traditional symbols, and therefore dependent upon them for his continuity as a writer. The compulsion which so clearly drives Mr. Litvinoff seems to assure us that he will not be content to remain thus, as it also suggests further and deeper elaborations of *The Lost Europeans*, which, for all its merit, one must see as ' a symbol of transition ' from a rather turgid poetry to what promises to be an exciting prose, when it performs more truly the function of the novel.

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Some Men are Brothers

D. J. Enright.

(The Phoenix Living Poets, Chatto and Windus with the Hogarth Press, 1960. 10/6)

When T. S. Eliot spoke of experience as a 'heap of broken images' he described what is now a common awareness of life and history. A typical instrument of that awareness is the short poem, no longer necessarily lyrical, that dominates English poetry today. This fragmentation of experience perpetuates the short poem, and the short poem, in its way, perpetuates the fragmentation of experience. The English poetic mind, instead of enlarging itself, like the pearl, on the formless mass surrounding it, seems almost universally impelled to reproduce amoeba fashion and dissipate its images in effortless variations of itself, of almost equal size and shape. There seems to be a fear of growth, a lack of nucleus, an acceptance of means for ends, of fragments for wholes, a repetitious collection of notes that no-one dare enlarge upon. Sometimes this lack of unity in experience and the corresponding lack of imagination in poetry may find expression, subjectively, as a kind of anguish and, objectively, as a kind of committed picaresque. In the poetry of D. J. Enright there has been something like progress from the one to the other.

Two reactions that grow inevitably from fragmentation are a search for wholeness in the various forms of God or helpless, unpalliated anguish. Enright, under cover of their farcical apparitions, rejected both 'the slavering search for God . . . and polished Monsieur Angst who cracks the whip.' His own experience was, however, as fragmentary and denuded as any to whom these are the only alternatives possible:

> For history – in the smallest sense – had fallen about me:
> Held for a moment between these toppling towers,
> Unable to understand, hatefully lost in obscure ways, I sat
> Suspended, dumbfounded, uneasily contained within my débris.

Between experience there was 'a nervous transit,' 'a change of homelessness,' 'a present past, a dubious present, and a future full of fears.' This is the Waste Land, the world of fragments and unease, and its inhabitant a kind of passive helpless *picaro,* going round in endless circles:

> And so he drifts on . . .
> . . . And so would drift on,
> For the route is circular, ever repeating itself.

The poetry too, following the man, tended to be broken and repetitive.

After *The Laughing Hyena* (1953) Mr. Enright's second volume, *Bread Rather than Blossoms* (1956) was dedicated to 'those who farm the Waste Land,' and it represents his own attempt to do precisely this. Rejecting 'the slavering search for God' and 'polished M. Angst,' reactions of the self in the Waste Land. Mr. Enright found in Japan an objective real Waste Land, 'a land of breakage' where men 'quietly build again.' In such a country, under such conditions, the self, still persistently fragmentary, found a landscape which at once mirrored the continual breaking of experience and at the same time drew the self away from its own

unsolved problems to awakening feelings of ' common humanity,' to which Mr. Enright also drew our attention in his critical work, *The Apothecary's Shop* (1957). This land held his attention and brought with it new purpose, and new problems and distress :

> Potter's field; where everything is used
> And broken;
> in love and strife
> The old and new are lost; the ants run
> Over all; *where art dies back to life.*

He gave a clear indication of his purpose in an essay replying to Professor Dobrée's Clark Lectures (1952-3), *The Broken Cistern,* which dealt with the absence from modern poetry of great public themes :

> Professor Dobrée remarks that Internationalism cannot replace Patriotism as a public theme in poetry. " You cannot love people by the million." That is true. But I doubt whether you can even love people by the thousands : . . . Yet you can *learn* – if you really come to grips with the individual, the small particular – that millions of people are, at any rate and for part of the time, worthy of love !

Thus in a world where psychological unity seems impossible, we must look for wholeness of a kind in our ' common humanity,' in Internationalism. Enright, as a peripatetic scholar, is well qualified to speak of Internationalism, and his latest volume of poems, *Some Men are Brothers,* represents his coming ' to grips with the individual, the small particular ' and finding ' for part of the time ' inhabitants of various countries ' worthy of love '. It is only part of the time; this specious wholeness too breaks down and Enright realises that humanity is not common, that only *some* men are brothers. As poetry this admirable enterprise has a mixed success.

Coming to grips with individuals of poor Eastern countries (Siam, Japan) or former enemies (Berlin) the poet becomes oppressed by the ineffectuality of his art in the face of life. In the beginning was the Deed : ' a tip . . . and not a tract.' In Japan, the cherry tree ' is silent for its deeds suffice.' So urgent is his concern that it tends to override his art, and since the rhythms he adopts are so loose, often flat, and inept, many poems give way under the strain. One often has the impression that Enright's free verse is really free. In some poems ' art *dies back to life* ' so heavily as to be bathetic and disappointing. *Exile*?, for example, ends : ' It seems like what life is.' And *Art Demands* would have been far more pointed without its last four lines.

Thus the most successful poems are often those that deal explicity with what has also been the chief concern of Enright's criticism, the relation of Art to Life. Among these are *Written Off, Changing the Subject, A Polished Performance, Where Charity Begins.* In these poems the subversive sabotage gives way to a tenser dialectic and more finished poems. The ending of, for example, *The Popular Theatre,* does not become disappointingly lax but remains taut and effective.

The ' individuals ' of Enright's poetry are mostly the suffering, the starved and the poor of the various Eastern lands where he has lived and taught. This is matter to move immediately almost any heart and conscience, but it does not justify Enright becoming, as he often does, too easily content with *reportage.* It is largely a modern heresy that art is not needed to make such important themes profoundly felt. Enright often

subscribes to this heresy. There is perhaps too much *ad hominem* and not enough *au lecteur*. Enright's criticism of Auden's least successful poems may be applied equally to his own : ' In his least successful, the words lie there, flat and inanimate, like programme notes,' – like notes, like promises, awaiting a vital elaboration. *Entrance Visa* is the worst example of this.

And reading other poems one gets the impression that Enright himself is aware of this. Much of his ironical comment on Art and Life seem to be a genuine regret not so much for the shortcomings of poetry in general, but for his own shortcomings as a poet. This is especially evident in *The Oyster's Complaint*. One begins to wonder whether his theme is not, after all, Internationalism but his own honesty, and one feels cheated at times that a man attempts to make his poetry out of the feeling that he is not a very good poet. The irony of this situation is best brought out in *A Displaced Person Looks at a Cage-Bird:*

I do wish it were dead!
Then I'd write a better poetry,
On that poor wee bird, its feet in the air,
An innocent victim of something. Just like me.

There is a better poetry to be written. Against our ' broken images ' we need more lasting ones than these. Experience remains crude and undigested. Enright's route, though more purposeful, is still circular and thus repetitive. His journey is that of a reporter taking notes, as concerned as ever as a Mayhew or an Orwell were. But notes are not enough. It takes a lot of grapes and time to make one good cup of wine; one unripe grape, hastily squeezed, tends to make a tiny mess. Faced with the problems Enright tackles we need the product of vision rather than sightseeing. After three volumes Enright must still be looked on as a poet of promise. In each there has been enough good to make one wish to buy the next. Meanwhile one goes on waiting for the sustained effort. ' Life is long,' as Enright has it, ' and Art is short ' and at times so short-winded that between each respiration one fears that it is dead. One would be grateful for the sustained effort, if this has not already been expended, like the effort of Kingsley Amis and John Wain, on the making of novels that have been greeted with acclaim.

T. W. HARRISON : born Leeds, 1937. Educated at Cross Flatts Primary School, Leeds Grammar School, and the University of Leeds where he read Latin. He taught history and English in a Secondary Modern School in Dewsbury before returning to the University to complete a Ph.D. thesis on the English translations of Virgil.

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Time

shows us all things are relative. So does Place – with the added complication that there various Times can meet. Modern Malaya today provides THE TIME AND THE PLACE of Susan Yorke's latest novel (16s.) and both are unpropitious for those whose full allegiance is neither to East nor West. This story of a Malay girl "westernised" at the whim of a European woman, but finding herself unable to outgrow all the claims of her background, is typical of something that is happening all over the East as colonialism is thrust out with one hand while Western "civilisation" is as eagerly dragged in with the other.

MACDONALD

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Collected Poems 1921-1958

Edwin Muir (Faber, 25s.)

Some years ago I was in almost daily contact with the late Edwin Muir for a period of several months. With many poets a degree of personal acquaintance would be a useful preliminary to reviewing their life's work; no matter how much one believes in the impersonality and autonomy of art, there is, when it comes to the point, a certain – possibly illegitimate – pleasure in relating the work to what one knows of the man. But with Muir this is hardly the case. One of the kindest of men, he was also one of the most remote and, in the deepest sense, uncommunicative : his major insights into existence were conveyed in his poems, not in the casual exchanges of everyday life. In fact, one learnt far more about Muir from his fine *Autobiography* than from meeting him; if the poetry needs any kind of key, one will discover it in that work.

Reading through the *Collected Poems,* which fortunately are arranged in a straightforward chronological fashion, I get the impression that Muir became far more essentially a poet in the later years of his life. During the twenties and thirties when he was primarily a literary journalist and translator he seems to have written poetry only occasionally; in this collection there are some pieces taken from his *First Poems* of 1925, but his most ambitious poetic work of this period was the long poem, or group of poems, *Variations on a Time Theme,* which appeared in 1934. This was followed in 1937 by *Journeys and Places,* but it was not until the war years and afterwards that Muir achieved concentration and fluency; between 1943 and 1956 he published four more volumes, and at the time of his death he left a good many uncollected poems, which are reproduced at the end of this book.

In the last of these poems, probably the last poem he ever wrote, one finds a brief statement of the preoccupations that dominate all Muir's poetry :

> And now that time grows shorter, I perceive
> That Plato's is the truest poetry,
> And that these shadows
> Are cast by the true.

Throughout his life Muir was an instinctive Platonist, always concerned with the conflict between time and eternity, appearance and reality, or – to use a different terminology – the real and the ideal. In his autobiography he dramatized this polarity as ' the story and the fable '; the 'story' dealing with the constant flux of contingent events; the 'fable' conveying the essential underlying meaning. These two elements lead us to the other central image of Muir's poetry, the Eden myth. As a child Muir grew up amid the pastoral life of Orkney, pre-eminently a world of ' fable,' which was always to remain for him a personal Eden; he was expelled when still very young into the brutal world of industrial Glasgow, where he had to acquiese in all the trivialities and pressures which comprise the mechanics of the ' story.' Muir had the unusual distinction of enacting in his per-

sonal life certain of the archetypal patterns which dominate the human imagination, and he possessed the kind of detached, visionary temperament which enabled him to realise them in art. In *Variations on a Time Theme* he wrote :

> A child in Adam's field I dreamed away
> My one eternity and hourless day,
> Ere from my wrist Time's bird had learned to fly,
> Or I had robbed the Tree of which I die,
> Whose boughs rain still, whose fruit wave-green shall fall
> Until the last great autumn reddens all.

In this poem, Time is seen as the enemy, negating the possibilities of human achievement :

> Time's a fire-wheel whose spokes the season turn,
> And fastened there we, Time's slow martyrs, burn.

In Muir's later work he attained a more serene outlook, being conscious that ' Plato's is the truest poetry.' Indeed, his greater spiritual assurance seems to have been directly related to the increase of his poetic powers. In general, Muir's attitudes can be described as religious; in his early poetry there is a somewhat gnostic note, but the later work is more or less overtly Christian; see, for example, ' The Church,' written in America during the last years of his life. Stephen Spender has remarked that when Muir was living in Rome he became increasingly impressed with the symbols of the Incarnation that he saw about him (though he did not, so far as I know, specifically subscribe to any form of Christian orthodoxy).

Yet there is a sense in which Muir's poetry, impressive as this collection shows it to be, can be described as too little ' incarnational.' Muir's vision was always on the Beyond, to that timeless region where the great archetypes preserve their immutable existence : the sea, the road, journeys, mountains, trees, animals, Eden. They recur throughout his work in various patterns, and there is a good deal of interest in noticing how they acquire richer associations of meaning and emotion as Muir's poetry develops. Yet there is a danger in reading any archetypal literature of mistaking the pattern for the totality. Muir's concern for the fable rather than the story meant, I think, that he put too low a valuation on the specific manifestations of creaturely life, passing and contingent though they may be. By his very nature the poet – as opposed to the metaphysician or the visionary – has to be concerned with *this* road, *this* tree, *this* garden, rather than with the great images that subsume all possible varieties of them. Or at least, he has to start with them, even though he may finish on the plane of eternity. In this respect, Muir was a profoundly untypical poet, for he was less inclined than most to give his archetypes a local habitation and a name. More seriously, he was unconcerned, on the whole, with *words,* which are for the poet inescapable manifestations of the specific. Muir never wrote carelessly, and there is always a basic conscientiousness about his choice of words; but one has, too often, the feeling that he is writing with rather than across the grain of language. The point is illustrated if we compare Muir's poetry, dealing with the encounter of time and eternity, with Eliot's *Quartets,* which have a comparable if not identical theme (Muir certainly learnt from Eliot, whose influence was already very evident in *Variations on a Time Theme*). For Eliot the spiritual experience and the linguistic exploration which conveys it are one; Muir, on the other hand, tended to treat language with the

same detachment with which he regarded other manifestations of the actual world. For this reason he cannot, I think, be counted among the major poets of our time.

Nevertheless, he is, within his chosen limits, an extremely fine poet, whose work grows steadily more rewarding with closer acquaintance. His very latest poetry seems to me his best, with an intensity and clarity which is difficult to convey in a brief quotation. Yet one of his finest poems is 'The Combat,' included in his 1949 volume, *The Labyrinth*. Here Muir's characteristic archetypes are transformed into memorable and complex symbols :

> And all began. The stealthy paw
> Slashed out and in. Could nothing save
> These rags and tatters from the claw?
> Nothing. And yet I never saw
> A beast so helpless and so brave.
>
> And now, while the trees stand watching, still
> The unequal battle rages there.
> The killing beast that cannot kill
> Swells and swells in his fury till
> You'd almost think it was despair.

ALAN SILLITOE

Say Sheffield

> A cellar on the outskirts of
> Say Sheffield
> Like that of Ekaterinburg
> Not so long ago
> Is waiting underground to become
> (Passed every day by a thousand pair of shoes)
> To become a wheel-chock
> Suddenly pulled out of this
> Little world of England :
> Rifle shots severing
> Each string that will collapse
> This cathedral of bluebells –
>
> Like the cellar in Ekaterinburg
> Of not so long ago
> Was passed by many pairs of shoes
> Before a certain family was hurriedly
> Dragged in and immortalised.

The Circulation of the Light

For Rosalind Vacher

Child after child, as time disposes,
Comes crying down to the blind mazes,
And, with this world, puts on a pelt,
The wolfskin of ancestral guilt,
As if for clarity was needed
A creature on all fours and blinded,
And prerequisite, such a night,
For the beatitudes of light.

Some catch no gleam though; Doom it jars
Their wincing ghost, the manias
Hedged round about them are too thick
For the slim verities of shock
To pierce. Transfixed, till time erazes
The beating life of its gross mazes,
Wait they, bereft of wrong and right,
The circulation of the light.

By energies foregone and banished,
By just so much are we diminished,
And yet it is by shades out-thrown
From what we are we can be known,
If we take back from the dark mirror
Of someone else, both love and terror;
Initiate so, by second sight,
The circulation of the light.

Still, here today, past time it glosses
With a bad cloud the human faces,
And men, their real need and hunger,
Are blurred for me by some past anger,
Dreams that still colour and work on
My day, long past their origin
In those whose life my life possessed;
Rid me, I say, of this foul taste!
But still, through gaps, through brief insight,
The circulation of the Light.

THOMAS BLACKBURN: born Cumberland, 1916, and educated a Bromsgrove School and Durham University. His publications include *The Outer Darkness, The Holy Stone, In the Fire,* and *The Next Word* He held the *Gregory Fellowship* in Poetry at Leeds, 1956-58.

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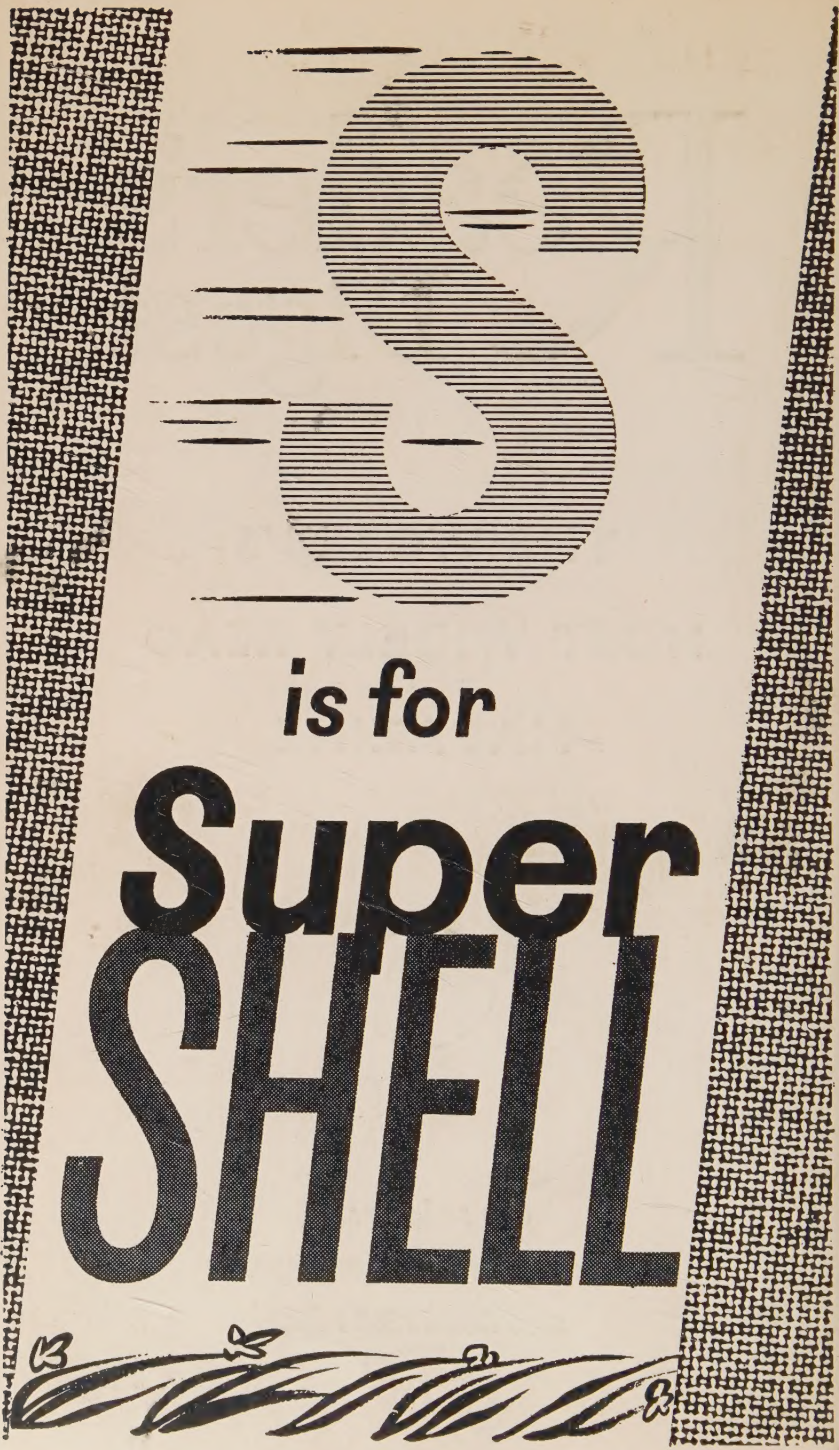

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